THE FRONTIERSMAN

H. A. CODY

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A Tale of the Yukon

BY

H. A. CODY

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CHAPTER I

NIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS

CREEK, swish! Creek, swish! hour after hour sounded forth the yielding snow-shoes as Keith Steadman, hardy northman and trailsman, strode rapidly forward. For days he had listened to their monotonous music, as he wound his devious way over valleys, plains, and mountain passes, down toward the mighty Yukon River, pulsing on to the sea through the great white silence.

There was snow everywhere. Snow on the river, sparkling like a million diamonds; snow on the lakes, lying smooth and white. Snow on the trees, hanging in beautiful, fairy-like clusters; snow on the sun-kissed mountains, fleecy, golden, drifting. Snow, frosty, hard, surrounding the traveller, pouring into his lungs at every breath, clinging to his eyebrows, whitening his unkempt beard, and decorating the furry fringes of his loose parka.

"Cold night," he muttered to himself, as he paused to readjust the rope of the small sled he was drawing, to the right shoulder.

Then he glanced back over the trail, and a dark object arrested his attention, drawing nearer and nearer.

"A wolf! and on my track, too! I expected as much in this desolate spot," and the traveller unslung the small rifle from his back and stood ready for action.

For some time the animal did not look up, but kept its nose close to the ground, and trotted steadily on. Then it lifted its head, slowed down to a walk, and at length stopped.

"I don't like that brute on my track at this time of the day," thought Keith. "Perhaps a leaden message may give it a hint to travel elsewhere."

He raised his rifle to his shoulder and took aim. Then he lowered it, moved by some sudden impulse. "Why, I believe it's a dog, not a wolf at all," and he gave a sharp whistle to the watching animal.

The dog, for so it was, pricked up its ears, moved forward, and stopped; but no coaxing on the traveller's part could induce it to advance any further. After trying in vain for some time to make friends with the cur, Keith resumed his weary walk.

The short winter day was drawing to a close, and the sun had dipped behind a tall, hoary peak. The

shadows stealing over the land warned him that night was shutting down, and camping time was near.

Ahead lay a clump of thick fir trees, which promised shelter and an abundance of wood. Toward this he moved, the dog following some distance behind. Reaching the place, it did not take him long to clear away the snow from a suitable spot, using one of his narrow snow-shoes as a shovel. This done, he built a fire from the dead trees standing close by, and prepared a generous supply of fuel to last during the cold night. With much skill, acquired through long practice, he soon fashioned a cosy little nest on one side of the fire, from the richly-scented fir boughs. To make the shelter more complete, he erected in the background a brush barricade in the form of a semi-circle, a few feet high. In front of of this he spread a wolf-skin robe.

"A palace fit for a king," he remarked, half aloud, as he glanced around upon his handiwork. "Now for supper."

A little bacon, a few beans, a taste of sourdough bread, with some black tea for a relish, formed the humble repast.

In the meantime the dog had crept close, attracted by the warm, bright fire, and stood looking wistfully upon the bacon lying before him.

"Hungry, old boy, eh?" asked Keith. "You look

as if you had eaten nothing for a month. Well, then, here's a piece of bacon and bread. To-morrow I'll try to snip a rabbit for you."

The ravenous beast seized eagerly the precious morsels, devoured them with a gulp or two, and looked longingly for more.

"Can't do it, doggie," said Keith, noticing the animal's beseeching eyes, "I've only a little left, and a hard trail lies ahead."

Then something around the dog's neck arrested his attention. It was a small object fastened to a rude collar. What could it be?

"Come here, laddie," he called, "and let me see what you've got there."

The cur, however, kept at a safe distance, but showed a degree of friendliness by short jerks of his tail.

"Perhaps a piece of bacon will bring him," and Keith held a portion temptingly before his view.

The dog pricked up his ears, advanced, drew back, and looked around. Then, squatting down upon his haunches, he lifted his nose into the air and gave vent to a most doleful howl.

"Come on, old boy," encouraged Keith, still holding the bacon between his fingers.

Little by little the dog approached, and with much coaxing was induced to draw near, and after a time nestled by the man's side, where he quickly devoured the coveted morsel of food.

"Now, let's see what you've got here," and Keith examined the object attached to the collar.

It was a piece of brown paper, old and soiled, and evidently it had seen hard usage. It was carefully folded, and tied with twine made up of several short pieces. With the point of his hunting knife, Keith cut the string, and when he had opened the paper he beheld a number of words, scrawled with some red material, which looked much like blood. By the flickering camp fire he managed with difficulty to decipher the following startling message:

"For God's sake, help. I'm dying."

That was all, and for some time Keith held the paper in his hand and gazed steadily into the fire.

"Strange," he mused. "Where could the animal have come from? I did not know there was a white man near. But it must be some poor wretch who has been stranded in this desolate region. Let me see. That dog could not have travelled far in his present miserable condition. I believe I could track him, and perhaps find his master either dead or alive. But then that would mean great delay, and I hoped with hard travelling to reach Klassan by to-morrow night. Besides, there is not much food left, only a little bacon, bread, and a few beans. Oh, well, I'll sleep on it, and in the morning perhaps I may see more clearly."

The fire roared cheerfully, seizing with avidity upon the dry fir sticks. The sparks shot up into

the darkness, whirling, twisting, and dancing, like so many happy fairies. The tall trees stood out in bold relief, sombre and silent. "Yes," he mused, "I believe it's a warning, and I must no longer hesitate. That poor fellow needs help, and no doubt this dog was guided by some good angel. I must go as soon as the day breaks, and leave the matter of food to the Father's care."

With the fire well replenished, and the loaded rifle close at hand, Keith rolled himself up in his wolf-skin robe and was soon fast asleep.

It seemed that he had lain but a short time, when he was aroused by a weight pressing against his body, accompanied by a startling noise. Half dazed, he lifted himself to a sitting posture and looked around. The fire was almost out and the charred sticks were emitting but a feeble glow. The weight against his body was caused by the dog, huddling near as possible and growling in the most ferocious manner. It did not take long to understand the creature's terror, for a sound fell upon his ears which caused his heart to beat fast and a cold chill to pass through his body. Out of the darkness came the long-drawn howls, which he easily recognized. They were wolves, drawing nearer and nearer, how many he could not tell. Quickly throwing a few fresh sticks on the smouldering embers, he seized his rifle, examined it carefully, and looked to the keen knife in his belt.

"Never mind," he remarked to the crouching form at his feet. "We'll give them a warm reception, at any rate."

"O-o-o-ow. O-o-o-ow," came those awful sounds, at any time terrible to hear, but at night in the lonely wild, how appalling!

Keith strained his eyes through the darkness in an effort to catch a glimpse of the enemy. That they were bearing down upon him there was no doubt. But look as he might nothing was to be observed except the trees standing silently around. Presently the howlings ceased, and all was still. What did this signify? That the wolves had gone on some other scent? Ah, no. Keith was too well accustomed to the ways of these creatures to believe such a thing. He knew that the stillness was but a prelude to the storm; that the animals were stalking their prey; that gleaming eyes were watching his slightest movement, and that keen white fangs were bared, ready to tear him to pieces.

Not for an instant did he abate his watchfulness, and ere long he beheld savage eyes, glowing like fiery balls, peering out of the night. Nearer and nearer they drew, until the forms of the animals could be dimly discerned. Then he brought the rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim, and fired. Instantly a sharp yell split the darkness, followed by fierce, snarling sounds, which plainly told that the fallen

brute was being devoured by its ravenous companions.

So quickly had all this taken place that before Keith had time for a second shot, or even to throw out the empty shell and drive a loaded one home, a huge beast sprang full upon him from the left. Instinctively he leaped aside, and the wolf, missing his prey, landed upon the fire only a short distance away. A cry of mingled pain and rage ensued as the creature's feet touched the hot coals. Then followed a scattering of sticks as the animal shot out of the fire and bounded off into the depths of the forest.

So sudden was the attack, and unexpected the deliverance, that Keith stared in amazement. Then a smile passed over his face at the thought of the wolf's surprise, and the spectacle of his hurried retreat. His merriment, however, was of short duration. There was stern work still ahead.

So intent was he on peering into the darkness after the fleeing form that he did not notice another large brute slinking stealthily up on his right. With a snarl it sprang straight at him, and before Keith could lift a hand in self-defence he staggered back, tripped over a twig, and fell heavily to the ground. With one hand he seized the wolf by the throat with a vise-like grip, while with the other he endeavored in vain to draw forth his hunting knife.

At this critical moment the dog, which up to this

time had presented the appearance of abject terror, aroused suddenly to action. It rushed upon the wolf like the incarnation of fury, and sinking its teeth into the monster's side began to tear the quivering flesh.

Assailed from this new quarter, the wolf tried to turn back upon the dog. This effort partly relieved the weight from Keith's body and enabled him to grip the handle of his trusty knife. It took but an instant to rip it from its sheath and plunge the keen, glittering point into his antagonist's side. With a yell of pain the wolf attempted to escape. It was too late; the blow had been sure, and ere long he was quivering in death upon the ground, with the dog worrying him to the last.

Keith at once sprang for his rifle, thrust in a loaded shell, and stood awaiting the next move of his savage enemy.

CHAPTER II

ABANDONED

ALL through the dark hours of the night Keith kept watch, with the anxious dog growling intermittently at his feet. He knew there were wolves still in the vicinity, for at times he could hear their ugly snarls near the spot where their companion had fallen.

Slowly the hours wore away, and at length the dawn began to steal over the land. It needed but a little light to show the dim forms of three wolves squatting on the snow some distance off. Bringing his rifle to his shoulder, Keith sent a ball straight through the heart of the largest, which bounded into the air, and then rolled over on the snow dead. The other two started up in surprise, but a second shot brought one of them to the ground, while his companion, bold brute though he was, turned and fled. Thus the weary watch and the fight were over, and Keith breathed a prayer of thankfulness at his escape from the blood-thirsty foe.

Long before the sun had made its appearance,

man and dog were retracing their steps over the trail they had traversed the previous evening. It meant much to turn back and thread their way across that desolate waste of snow, through dreary forests, level plains, and sweeping lakes.

Hour after hour they moved, Keith all the time keeping a sharp look-out for signs to show where the dog had taken his trail. Tracks of various kinds were plentiful, crossing and re-crossing one another in the most confusing manner. It was certainly a puzzling task to choose the ones which would lead him to his destination.

Slowly he proceeded, peering here and there for some solution of the mystery. In this manner he had advanced a considerable distance, when the whining of the dog caused him to glance back. The animal had stopped, and seemed to be in trouble, looking first at the man, and then away to the left. Wondering what was the matter, Keith returned to the spot.

"Well, doggie," he exclaimed, "what's wrong?"

But the cur continued to whine, looking alternately to the left and up into the man's face.

Suddenly a thought flashed into Keith's mind. Perhaps the brute was calling his attention to the right trail. It was worth investigating at any rate.

The dog seemed to read his thoughts, and, weak though he was, gave a joyful bark, and bounded off in the direction toward which he had been looking.

"There's something in this after all," mused Keith, as he followed hard after.

Away in the distance a range of mountains stood out bold and austere against the sky. At a certain place a break appeared, one of Nature's vast passes, and toward this the dog made his way. Ahead lay a large, open plain, devoid of trees. Across this they travelled to a forest beyond, which clothed the base of the mountains. The trees were large and resembled a vast, silent army wedged into the valley, as if forbidding any progress that way.

But the dog was not thinking of the trees, nor how grand they looked in their soft, snowy mantle. He had something else on his mind, and with firm assurance he nosed his way into their sombre depths.

For two hours they threaded the forest, up the long, winding valley, when at length a log cabin burst suddenly into view. It was small, low, and evidently had been built for some time. A stream of smoke, curling into the frosty air, betokened life within. Around the building many tracks of animals were visible, while here and there human footprints could be discerned.

There was no window to the shack, and the door was small and low. At this he knocked, while the dog scratched in his eagerness to gain admittance. No sound coming from within, Keith cautiously opened the rough barrier and entered, the cur leaping in ahead. The room was quite light from a

fire burning in a rude stone fire-place, before which crouched a weird form, with knees drawn up to the chin in Indian fashion. Hair, long and unkempt, fell down over his neck, and a beard, months old, was rough and straggling. The cheeks were hollow, and the weary, sunken eyes, turned toward the door, were filled with alarm. It was only the dog he saw, which had rushed forward, and was leaping around him in the wildest excitement, licking his hands and face with intense fondness.

The man, however, did not recognize the animal, but drawing his blanket more closely around his body, huddled down in a terrified manner.

"Back, back!" he moaned. "Don't come near! For God's sake, spare me! Don't touch me! Help! Father! Connie!"

The tears streamed down the poor creature's cheeks, as he crouched there on the floor, pleading with an imaginary foe. The scene was pitiable to behold, and Keith hastened to his side.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "The dog won't hurt you."

The man started and looked up in a dazed manner. Then he reached forward with his long, bony fingers.

"Save me!" he moaned. "Drive them away! They will kill me!"

"Why, there's nothing to harm you," Keith replied. "It's your own dog come back to you, and he's licking your hands and face in his delight."

A gleam of intelligence stole into the man's eyes, as he looked slowly around, somewhat relieved.

"My dog?" he continued. "Brisko? Not wolves?"

"No, not a wolf near. You are safe."

The man trembled. He caught Keith by the hand. He looked up into his face, and then, throwing his arms around the dog's neck, wept like a child.

"Safe, safe," he murmured. "Thank God! Oh, how they howled!" and a shudder shook his frame. "They tore at the roof; they scratched at the door. My God, it was awful! And to think that he left me to those devils!"

Then he leaned eagerly forward. "Did you see him? Did you meet him on the trail?"

"Meet whom?" demanded Keith, thinking the man was wandering in his mind.

"Bill; Bill, my partner."

"No, I have not met any one for days."

"Are you sure?" and the man crept near, and looked into the traveller's face in a beseeching manner. "Think hard. A man with a long beard, and the Devil's face."

"No, I tell you I have met no one. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, God, help me! You didn't see him, and he's got my gold! Yes, *my* gold," he cried, grinding his teeth in his rage. "Look, you. Listen. We were partners, Bill and I. We struck gold. To find it

we struggled hard. We tore the flesh from our hands on the rocks. Our feet bled. We suffered hunger and cold; but we found it. It was awful, but we found it. The trail was long, but we didn't mind; we had the gold. The wind howled down the mountain passes. We slept in the snow. For days we had little to eat, but we laughed, and hugged our pokes of gold, and kissed them as a mother kisses her babes. The dogs died one by one, except the leader there, and we ate them raw, like the wolves, which followed us and howled at night. But we laughed like ghosts, always laughed, for the gold was safe. We reached this cabin. Here we stayed, for we could go no further. We watched the gold, counting it over and over. Then one day he left me,—left me to die—and took my gold."

The man's rage was terrible. His sunken eyes shot fire. His emaciated frame quivered with the intensity of his emotion. He staggered to his feet. "I will find him!" he cried. "Let me go to him!" He tried to walk to the door, but in vain. With a cry he fell upon the hard floor, groped for an instant like a blind man, and then lay perfectly still.

The days that followed the man's collapse were fearful ones. Keith would not leave him in such a condition, and he fought a hard battle to save his life. With the aid of rabbits, a few ptarmigan, grouse, and the little food he had brought with him, he managed to exist. Twice he left the cabin and

scoured the forest for moose or deer, but the animals had deserted the locality. The wolves surrounded the shack at night, uttering their dreary cries, but kept warily out of gun-shot.

At times the sick man moaned and raved pitifully. As Keith sat hour after hour by his side he tried to piece together something of his past life from the broken words which fell from his lips. Often it was of the trail, the gold, and Bill. But again he wandered to other scenes in which "Connie," "the violin," and various pieces of music played important parts.

"Connie. Connie," he would say, over and over again. "Where is my violin? Bring it to me."

At such moments his poor, gaunt fingers would search eagerly over the blanket to reach the imaginary instrument. So often did he mention "Connie," that Keith felt quite sure she must be his sister, and in his mind he pictured a sweet-faced maiden, far away in some comfortable home, wondering, perhaps, when her brother would return.

One night, as he sat wearily at his post, something attracted his attention. It was a string fastened around the man's neck. Hoping to obtain some clue to his identity, he examined it closely, and found it held a small locket, hidden beneath the rough shirt. Opening the trinket, the beautiful face of a young woman was exposed to view. Long and earnestly he studied it, and, notwithstanding the wasted con-

dition of the man lying before him, he could easily trace a marked resemblance between the two faces. Two letters, "K. R.," were neatly engraven upon the gold cover, but nothing else could he find which would reveal the man's name.

Carefully, almost reverently, he closed the locket, and restored it to its former position. But the sweet eyes which had looked forth at him still remained in his mind. The face burned itself into his soul, and twice during the night he again opened the locket, and studied the features most earnestly.

For ten long years he had not looked upon such a face, and to see this one before him brought back scenes of by-gone days. He remembered one, how pretty she looked on his graduation day, and what a thrill of pleasure he had experienced as she placed her delicate hand into his, and uttered words of congratulation. The future looked very bright then, and in all his visions that little woman stood out sweet and clear. But that was years ago, and now —she had been married long since to a portly, wealthy merchant, while he, no doubt, was forgotten.

At length, wearied out with watching, he threw several sticks upon the fire and lay down in front of it for a short nap. He awoke with a start, to find the fire low, and the form wrapped in the wolf-skin robe very still. A sense of dread crept over him, and, going to his side, he peered into that haggard face. Yes, it was still. The expression was

one of peace, the awful peace of death. His right hand, firmly clutching the string of the little locket, was lying upon his breast. For him, at least, the long trail was ended.

CHAPTER III

THE GRAVE IN THE SNOW

THE sun of the short winter day was touching the mountain peaks, and slowly stealing down their rugged sides, as Keith emerged from the cabin bearing the cold body of the unknown man. He had a sacred task to perform, and he would not leave the place till all was completed. He had no winding sheet, no coffin in which to lay that silent form. A deep hole dug in the snow with the point of a snow-shoe, was grave and coffin combined, while the same soft, yielding snow spread tenderly over the body was the only winding sheet.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord." How weird and strangely hollow sounded his voice in that lonely place, as he repeated from memory some of the beautiful sentences of the Burial Service of the Church of England. There were none to respond, none to weep, and none to lay fresh flowers upon that snowy mound. There was one mourner, however; the lean dog, silent and wistful,

crouching near. At times he glanced up into the speaker's face, as if trying to comprehend the meaning of the words.

"Poor dumb brute," said Keith, when the prayers were over, "you are faithful to the last. While this man was deserted, left here to die, you did what you could to save him. For this, Brisko, old boy, you shall have a home with me, or, I should say, an abiding place, for I hardly know the meaning of the word home."

Before leaving the cabin, Keith had searched long and carefully for some clue as to the dead man's identity. There was only the little locket, which he felt might some day help to explain the matter. Reluctantly he had unclosed the cold, stiff fingers from the slender string, and fastened the trinket around his own neck as the best place where it could be safely guarded.

When the body was well covered he sought for some way to mark the spot. A stick would stand but a short time; something else must serve. Presently an idea occurred to him. Near the grave a huge rock lifted itself several feet into the air, with a side so smooth and perpendicular that no snow could rest upon its surface. Going at once to the cabin, he brought forth the dead man's camping axe, and with the dull blade began to cut into the solid rock.

"Yes," he muttered to himself, "you shall have

as solid and grand a monument as the world can afford. The grave is not pretty, I admit, and no hand will lay flowers over you. But this stone will not tumble down till the finger of God touches it, and, I think," he added after a pause, "with this mark upon it He'll let it stand till the Judgment Day."

The mark was a large cross, not artistically done, but cut deep into the hard surface to withstand the wear of years. Beneath this he simply placed the two letters "K. R."

"Not too bad," he remarked, as he stepped back to view his handiwork. "It's the best I can do with such a rough tool, and I think *she* would be pleased to know that something marks the spot where he is lying."

Then, a strong dual feeling came over him. He longed to track the dead man's rascally partner, find him, and have the just punishment meted out upon his head. Next, to meet the original of the picture, restore the locket, and to tell the story of the death in the wilderness.

"What an appearance I would make," he mused, glancing at his rough buck-skin clothes, coarse leggings, and moccasined feet, while his right hand swept across his unkempt beard and long hair. "If she could see me now she would think I had murdered her brother instead of fighting hard to save his life."

Leaving the grave he returned to the cabin. Here he strapped his slender outfit on the small sled, and with snow-shoes on his feet left the place. He had advanced some distance when suddenly he remembered the dog. He stopped and gave a sharp whistle. Then he called, but the animal did not appear.

"Strange!" he thought. "What has happened to the brute? I must not leave him here."

Retracing his steps, he searched the cabin. Not finding him, he went to the grave, and there, lying on the snowy mound, he found the poor brute. His grief was plainly evident, and, as he lifted his head in response to Keith's call, sorrow, almost human, was depicted on his face. Only after much coaxing was he induced to leave the spot, abandon his old master, and cast in his lot with the new.

Together, at length, they set out upon the long trail; the man drawing the sled, the dog walking dejectedly behind. It was a dreary march over that desolate waste, as on and on they moved, two creeping specks. Nowhere, except it be upon the heaving ocean, does one feel more deeply his own insignificance than when alone in the great white North in midwinter. No human voice to break the awful silence; no song of bird or buzz of insect to fall upon the ear; thousands of miles from home, in a roadless wilderness.

As the second day was drawing to a close, Keith's weary steps quickened. He leaned eagerly forward,

his strong, gaunt face filled with expectancy. Creak! Creak! How loudly the snow-shoes sounded at each swinging stride. The noise disturbed him. He stopped and listened intently. Then a look of disappointment passed over his countenance. His gaze swept the sky. The Northern Lights were streaming across the heavens like huge pennons flung out into a strong breeze. The unseen spirits of the North seemed to be marching and countermarching in vast battalions through the Arctic night. Their banners rose, faded, vanished; to reappear, writhing, twisting, curling, flashing forth in matchless beauty all the colours of the rainbow. Yellow and green, green and yellow, ruby-red and greenish-white, chasing one another, vieing with one another as the great, silent army incessantly retreated and advanced.

Such scenes seldom failed to arouse in Keith the feeling of wonder and awe, but on this night he hardly noticed the grand display. He was watching the friendly stars as they tumbled out one by one. For long years they had been his steady companions on many a toilsome journey, and he read them like an open book. He saw the belted Orion swinging in its accustomed place, and the Great Bear dipping close to the horizon. It was seven o'clock, he felt sure of that, and yet that sound did not come. He advanced for some distance, halted, and again listened.

It was a cold night, and his breath pouring forth in clouds smote with a hissing sound upon the frosty air. He heeded it not. His parka hood was backward thrown to enable him to hear the better.

Presently dark forms loomed up out of the night, straight before him. "I was afraid of it," he muttered. "The rumor I heard was only too true, and they are here! May God help us!"

The objects which he beheld were log cabins, which he soon reached. No lights shone from the buildings, and the place seemed deserted. Passing among the houses he crossed an open space of ground, climbed a hill, and approached a long, low structure. He opened the door and entered. The place was in darkness, but quite warm. Soon he emerged, and looked around much puzzled. The Indian camps lay stretched out before him along the brink of the hill. These he visited one by one, but no sound greeted him except the occasional snarl or bark of a dog. What did it all mean? He placed his hand to his forehead, and tried to think. Where were the miners? What had happened to the Indians? Why was the place deserted?

As he stood before one of the lodges, uncertain what to do, a cry fell upon his ear. Again it came, this time much lower. Keith peered through the darkness. He hurried down the hill. He saw a faint glimmer of light, and found it came from a log building directly before him. The clamour of voices,

cries of rage and confusion, could be distinctly heard, as with fast beating heart he bounded forward. He guessed the truth, and knew there was no time to lose. He reached the door, and, scarcely waiting to lift the latch, he drove it open with one push of his powerful shoulder, and gazed upon the scene within.

CHAPTER IV

"WHERE IS MY FLOCK?"

FOR long years the Indian village of Klassan had lain snugly ensconsed between the sheltering arms of two towering mountains. Once, beyond the memory of the oldest native, the lodges had stood close to the small river Kaslo, which poured its icy waters into the mighty Yukon. But one mild spring night an ice jam in a deep, narrow gorge, pressed by the tremendous weight of water, gave way, and, rushing down, carried destruction to the little Indian town, and to a number of the inhabitants. Since then the village stood further back at a higher elevation, secure from the devastating floods which occurred at frequent intervals.

Here the Indians were living their wild life, sunk in degradation and superstition, when found by Keith Steadman, medical missionary from Eastern Canada. At the command of his veteran Bishop of the Mackenzie River, he had forced his way over the Rocky Mountains, sought out these wandering sheep of the wilderness, and for ten long years lived in their midst.

It was uphill work to root out old ideas, to plant new seeds, and to overcome the jealousy of the Medicine Men. Often his life was in great danger, but in the end he conquered and won the confidence of the natives.

With his own hands he assisted in erecting a log church and school room, decorating the interior of the former with beautiful designs and mottoes, much to the Indians' delight. In addition, there was the little bell, which arrived some years later, and swung in the small belfry, constructed of four long poles, by the side of the church. Since then its sweet tones had called the natives together at the appointed hour of seven. No matter how busily engaged they might be, all work was suspended, and they hastened to the sanctuary to offer up their devotions to the Great Father on high. At times Keith, returning from visits to outlying bands of Indians, hearing the sound of the bell some distance off, would know that all was well at the village.

During the summer of his tenth year at Klassan, he was summoned to the Mackenzie River, to attend a Conference of missionaries which was to be held there. It was a long journey, and he dreaded to leave his post for such a length of time. Before departing, however, he called the band together, committed them to care of the trusty native catechist, Amos, and received their promises of true allegiance.

Keith had been absent but a few weeks, when a

crowd of miners struck Klassan. Prospectors had been roaming the land for years, and at length made several good discoveries along the Kaslo.

The white men came, fifty strong, from the Lower Yukon, built their cabins at Klassan close to the river, and began operations. The work of mining progressed rapidly, and much gold was secured. During the long winter evenings little could be done, so the men gathered at Jim Perdue's place, which was store and saloon combined, to gamble and to drink bad whiskey.

The latter was a strange concoction, manufactured on the spot, to take the place of the limited supply of whiskey which had been brought in from the outside. It was known generally as "hootch," though some called it "Forty-rod whiskey," from its supposed power of killing at that distance. It was formed of a large quantity of sugar of molasses, with a small percentage of dried fruit for flavouring, while ordinary sourdough was used for fermentation. When ready for use it was poured into an empty kerosene tin, and served hot or cold according to the taste of the customer.

This nearness of the miners was a severe test of the Indians' loyalty. At first they kept much aloof from the newcomers, and remained firm to their absent teacher and pastor. But at length several weakened and were enticed into the saloon, where ere-

long they were imitating the pernicious ways of the white men. Most of them, however, held their ground, especially the older ones, who stood faithfully by Amos in the time of trial.

The catechist was much grieved to see the young men drifting into such evil habits. He pleaded earnestly with them and induced a number to leave for their winter hunting grounds. But with others he had no influence; he had lost his control entirely.

Every night, however, at the appointed hour the mission bell rang out its full, clear summons, and the faithful few never failed to meet together in the little church. Then Amos would read the prayers in the rhythmical Indian dialect, and give a brief address of exhortation.

One night, before closing his remarks, he said to them, "To-morrow, I go to visit my traps, and to track a moose which I know is near. I may be a little late in getting back, so I ask Paul Nitsi to build the fire, ring the bell, and have everything ready when I come."

This was received with nods of approval, and after a few more words they separated.

That same night a very different scene was being enacted in Perdue's store. Cards and drinks formed the order of the evening.

"Ding, dong. Ding, dong. Ding, dong," sounded out the little bell.

"D—n that bell!" cried Bill Pritchen, a stranger, bringing his fist down upon the table with a bang. "I wonder you men stand it."

"How can we stop it?" asked Tim Murphy, cutting a wad from a plug of tobacco.

"Stop it? Why, I'd stop it d—n soon," returned Pritchen.

"Anyway, what good would it do?" continued Tim, who was fond of an argument. "The Indians are quiet and honest, mind their own affairs, and enjoy their little service."

"You'll see how honest they are, Tim Murphy. I never saw an honest Injun yet. Only dead Injuns are honest. Then look at their d—n superstition. Such psalm singing would be stopped in some camps as quick as h—l."

To this conversation Jim Perdue, the saloonkeeper, was the most interested listener. He hated Amos and the loyal members of the band, who kept aloof from his store and filthy poison. He determined, therefore, to use Pritchen as an instrument to further his evil designs upon the natives.

"So you think you can stop that bell from ringing, do you?" he asked. "Well, then, I'll bet a drink all around that you can't do it."

"I'll do it for one night," answered Pritchen guardedly.

"Oh, ye might fix the bell so it wouldn't ring fer one night, that'd be no trouble. But ye can't make

them leave their service, and come here fer a drink. If ye kin I'll supply the stuff free."

"Free poison," laughed one of the men. "Say, Jim, ye'd better go easy. The ground's too mighty tough, and we don't want to spend a month digging graves."

"Never ye fear, Dick," replied Perdue good naturedly. "You've stood the stuff all right, so I guess the Injuns are safe."

During this conversation Pritchen was thinking hard. When the laugh which followed the saloon-keeper's retort had subsided, he turned to him and said:

"Jim, I'll take your bet."

"What, to stop the bell, and to bring the Injuns here fer a drink?"

"Yes, but only for to-morrow night, remember."

"Oh, that'll do," replied Perdue. "I'll do the rest."

The next day Pritchen was unusually busy. Having obtained the aid of a native interpreter, he visited the Indians and set before them the plan he had carefully concocted during the night. The Great White Chief at Ottawa, so he told them, had heard of the Takudhs, and how they attended the services of his Church. So pleased was he with their faithfulness that he had sent him, Pritchen, all the way to Klassan to carry his message of good will, and to give a present to each one. He had only

lately arrived, and would like as soon as possible to carry out the Great White Chief's command. If the Indians would come over to the store in the evening he would be pleased to distribute the presents.

This harangue was received with evident approval by most of the natives, and bright visions danced before their eyes. There were others who were not so easily persuaded, of whom was the aged, wrinkled, and gray-haired chief of the band. He wished to know more, and asked for some token to show that the white man was telling the truth.

Pritchen was prepared for this, and at once brought forth a fair-sized poke of gold and held it up in his hand.

"Look," he said. "Much gold; the White Chief's gold. With this I will buy the presents in yonder store."

The various "ah, ah's" which passed from one to another revealed the effect his words produced. But still the old man was not convinced. Any miner might have that much gold, he told him. What else could he show?

Pritchen did not expect this, and felt somewhat confused. He fumbled in his pockets for some trinket to appease the suspicious chief. He was about to abandon the search when his hand struck a note book, in a pocket he had overlooked, on the inside of his rough jacket. He quickly drew it forth,

and from its pages produced a small photograph. That it was the face of a young man, handsome and fair, did not signify. It would serve his purpose, Pritchen felt sure of that.

"See," he said, holding it in his hand. "The white chief sends his picture to the chief of the Takudhs."

This was enough. All doubt was at once removed, and as the old man stretched out a scrawny hand for the treasure, a smile of triumph passed over Pritchen's hard face.

"I caught the rascal at last," he said to himself as he left the lodge. "It was mighty lucky for me that I had that photo. I had forgotten all about it. But I must get it back some way or else there may be trouble."

At the appointed hour of six the simple-minded Indians emerged from their various lodges and filed silently toward Perdue's store. Here they squatted on the floor, with their backs to the wall, awaiting proceedings.

A number of miners entered and stood or sat chatting with one another, apparently unconscious of the dusky figures in their midst. At length Pritchen arrived, and after conversing for a while in a low tone with Perdue he turned to the Indians. He told them again, through the same interpreter, of the great chief's love for them, and his interest in their welfare. He lengthened his speech as much as possible before distributing the presents. These were

cheap articles he had purchased from the store during the day; bright pieces of cloth for the women, pipes, tobacco, and knives for the men, while sugar was doled out to the children. This performance took some time, and a triumphant light gleamed in Pritchen's eye as he glanced at the small clock in the room.

"Now for the stuff," he cried.

At once, cups brimming with vile hootch were placed upon the rough bar. Seizing one in his hand Pritchen held it before the old chief's eyes.

"Drink," he said. "Good."

As the Indian looked in silence at the mixture, without offering to touch it, a stern voice rang out near the door. Some one was speaking in sharp, quick words in the Indian tongue, which produced an immediate effect. In an instant every eye was turned toward the speaker, when they beheld standing there the sturdy form of Amos, the catechist.

He had returned from his hunting trip, and, finding the church and the lodges deserted, suspected trouble. He made his way to the saloon, feeling quite certain that there he would find an explanation of it all. Neither was he mistaken. When he beheld the presents, and the cup of whiskey held so temptingly before the face of his revered chief, his wrath flared forth in righteous indignation. He lashed the Indians with a few stinging words of re-

buke, and, springing forward, with blazing eyes confronted Pritchen.

The latter, seeing the catechist's anger, realized the purport of his words. He saw that his scheme was likely to be frustrated simply through this one man.

"You dog of an Injun," he cried. "You vile psalm singer, get out of this and go to h—l," at the same time giving him a sharp slap in the face.

Stung to the quick by the double insult of word and blow, in the presence of his own people, and upon his ancestral domain, with a yell Amos leaped for his insulter. Pritchen was prepared for this, and with a well-directed blow sent the Indian reeling backwards. Recovering himself, however, with great agility, the catechist again rushed forward, dodged a second blow, and grappled with his opponent. But Pritchen was too much for him, and with a powerful effort partly disengaged himself from the native's grasp, and seized him by the throat with a death-like grip. Amos endeavored to free himself, but the more he writhed and struggled, the tighter pressed those terrible fingers.

So quickly had all this taken place, that for a while the squatting Indians stared in amazement. Then they realized the whole situation. Their leader, their chosen guide, was in danger, and had been grossly insulted by the white man. They leaped

to their feet, bore down upon the struggling pair, and tore away the fingers from the catechist's throat.

Pritchen had over-stepped the mark, and had brought the storm upon his own head. He fought hard to free himself from the violent hands which were laid upon him. The women tore his face and hair, the men dealt him savage blows, and he staggered to and fro in an effort to keep his feet and to escape from the human wildcats.

During this performance the miners had remained stolidly silent, and when they beheld the tables turned upon Pritchen smiles of satisfaction flitted across their faces. They had little use for the big, blustering bully. He was not one of them, anyway, only an intruder, and whence he came or what his business no one seemed to know. But when they saw him in real danger they bestirred themselves, went to his assistance, and everything pointed to a free and general fight.

At that instant the saloon door was flung open, and a tall, stalwart figure sprang into the room. A subtle influence spread over the contestants, and, pausing in their struggle, turned to look upon the new arrival.

"Lord! who is it?" gasped Tim Murphy, shrinking back a step or two.

The stranger's eyes swept the room with one swift glance. In an instant he comprehended much.

"Comrades!" he cried in a voice of terrible intensity, "what does this mean?"

Receiving no answer to his passionate appeal, he turned to Perdue, who was watching the proceedings with the keenest interest.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "What are you doing with my Indians? Where is my flock which I left in peace and quietness?"

"Who in h—l are you, and what business is it of yours what we do with the Injuns?" replied Perdue in a surly manner, at the same time shrinking back from those searching blue eyes, which seemed to pierce his very soul.

"Man," came the response, as a yearning arm reached out toward the natives, "they are mine. Through long years of travail I have borne with them, and I love them. I am Keith Steadman, the missionary."

At these words Pritchen started. A look of fear came into his eyes, and he glanced round as if seeking some avenue of escape. Then his appearance changed. His face darkened like a stormy sky. He reached forward, seized a cup of whiskey from the bar, and strode up to Amos, who was quiet in the presence of his master.

"D—n the missionaries, and their flocks!" he cried. "As I offer this to your chosen cur, before long we will give it to every one of your Bible suckers, and they will drink."

Keith turned quickly at these insulting words, saw the outstretched hand, and with one blow of his clenched fist he struck the cup, and dashed its contents into Pritchen's leering face.

With an oath of rage the latter sprang for the missionary. But he was not dealing with Amos now, nor any common man. It was one hundred and seventy pounds of trained flesh, iron nerve, and sinewy muscle that he encountered.

The missionary sprang to meet his adversary like a charger rushing to battle. For an instant only they grappled, when Keith, seizing Pritchen by the throat, hurled him back over the bar with a sickening thud. The boaster was pinned as in a vise. He struggled in vain to free himself from that terrible grip. In his frantic clutches to release the hand from his throat he ripped away the coarse shirt from his neck and bosom, while his face became livid. Keith's hand was lifted; he was about to strike. Suddenly he paused, his fingers relaxed, and with the words, "The Lord judge thee, thou wretched man," he flung Pritchen from him as if he were a viper, then turned and left the building.

CHAPTER V

"FOR MY MOTHER'S SAKE"

AMONG the Indians in Perdue's store none watched the proceedings more intently than Yukon Jennie, the orphan, whose home was in every camp, but with no certain abiding place. Wrapped in her old shawl, she crouched on the floor, taking no part in the rough-and-tumble fight. Her eyes were constantly fixed upon Pritchen with a strange fascination, which seemed never to waver. Once, when he sprang at Amos, she half started from her place, moved by some sudden impulse. But it was only for an instant, and then she shrank back to her former position.

When, however, the wild scene had ended, and the missionary had left the building, her whole being roused to activity. With the agility and stealthiness of a young tigress she glided from the room into the darkness without, and made straight for the Indian village. Reaching this, she wound her way among the various lodges till, stopping before one larger than the rest, she drew back the skin from the door and entered.

With no light to guide her she went at once to a corner of the room, and drew from a bundle of rags a small parcel. Unwrapping this, she brought forth a formidable looking knife, and with intense eagerness ran her small finger over the keen edge and sharp point. So satisfied was she at the result of this performance that a low chuckle of pleasure escaped her lips. Then, hastily concealing the weapon within the folds of her shawl, she left the lodge and started for the store.

"Ding, dong. Ding, dong. Ding, dong." The sharp sound spit the frosty air and stayed the feet of the little hurrying maid. She had never refused to obey its summons, which spoke to her like a living voice. To her childlike mind that dark thing hanging high aloft had a great meaning. It was the centre of an unseen world, and many were the strange and beautiful pictures she wove in her busy brain whenever the bell sounded out its message. But this night it was speaking directly to her in a warning sense. It seemed to understand her secret.

"Tell him. Tell him. Tell him," it was saying, over and over again.

She tried to go forward. She clutched the knife more firmly, and moved a few steps. She paused again, as a sudden thought came into her mind. Yes, she would listen to it. She would tell him first; after that there would be time.

Turning to the left, she started toward the

church. The bell had ceased before she reached the building, and all was still. Pushing open the door, she entered and slipped quietly into her accustomed place in a back seat. The rows of bowed heads in front of her were unseen; the altar, with its little wooden cross, flanked by the Ten Commandments in the Indian tongue, did not interest her as on other occasions, neither did the small mission harmonium, the delight of the natives, which had cost such an effort to bring to Klassan. She saw none of these. Her attention was fixed upon the kneeling form of the missionary, repeating several of the prayers of the Church.

He was dressed just as he had come from the trail.

Presently he arose and began to speak. He was calm, to all outward appearance, terribly calm, with not a hint of the seething furnace within.

"I am glad to be with you again," he told the Indians. "My heart has been yearning for you all, and I have many messages from the Gikhyi-Choh (the Bishop) of the Mackenzie River. His hair is white now, and his steps feeble, so he cannot make long journeys as of old, or else he would come to see you himself. Next year, before the ground is white with snow, and the wild geese have gone south, he hopes that another Gikhyi-Choh will come and live among us on this side of the mountains. When he comes he will cheer us, so we must be strong till then. Then the white men have arrived; some, but

not all, are wolves, and we must beware of their fangs. They would like to tear us to pieces, to break up our mission, and to ruin our young men and women. But we must stand together, and the Great Father in Heaven will send His Holy Spirit to guide us. I have many things to say, but I cannot speak of them now. We will meet again and have a long talk."

The Indians understood their leader. They needed no other word, and, after the benediction had been pronounced, they filed silently out of the building.

Jennie alone remained, almost hidden from view in the dimly candle-lighted church. She watched the missionary with her small bright eyes, saw him place his hand wearily to his forehead, and then turn to the little harmonium.

At first his playing dragged; it lacked the true fire of life. He was like one creeping foot-sore and lone over a long and darksome trail, far down in the valley. But as he played gradually he ascended from the mists below up the mountain side. The air became clearer and filled him with a new vigor. As he reached the top, and the sun shone out, his spirit leaped within him and thrilled his whole being. The heart nerved the hand and the weak, dilatory playing ceased. Hopefulness and courage burst forth in every note. His face cleared. He looked

up, and his countenance became transfigured with a glorious light.

For a time Jennie retained her position in the back of the church. She loved music dearly, and could not resist the temptation to remain very still and listen. But at length she left her place, glided up the aisle, and stood quite near the missionary. He did not notice her, so lost in thought was he. When, however, she reached out a thin, dusky hand and touched his arm, he gave a sudden start, and, turning quickly, looked upon the girl.

"Jennie!" he exclaimed. "You here! Why, I thought every one had gone!"

"All but me," she replied. "I waited to speak to you. It told me to come."

"It? And who is It?" asked Keith in a puzzled manner.

"The bell; it spoke to me, as I was going to the store, and said to tell you."

"What were you going to the store for, Jennie, and what were you to tell me?"

The girl looked earnestly into his face. "I saw him!" she gasped. "He was there! He has been here for some time! See—" and she drew the keen knife from the folds of her shawl. "It is sharp, my mother's knife. What she tried to do I will finish. She only scarred his breast, and died for it; I will go deeper and reach his heart."

A cold chill passed through Keith's frame as he listened to these terrible words, and observed the passion which possessed her soul. He could hardly believe it possible that this was the same gentle Jennie, the apt scholar, of whom he had hoped so much. His mind went back to one fearful night, seven years before, when he first met her, and saved her. He saw again her dead mother, with her lifeless babe in her bosom, the result of the renegade squaw-man, the vile serpent in human guise, who now menaced his flock. Jennie was a child of eight, alone with the dead in that desolate place. He had brought her to Klassan, where she had lived ever since, cared for by the Indians. They loved the maiden, but could not always understand her, with that dreamy, far-away look in her eyes. Little did they realize the deep longing in her heart, or the fire which was smouldering there, only awaiting an opportunity to burst forth. At last the time had arrived, and she stood ready with flashing eyes to carry out her design.

"Jennie," said Keith, calming his voice as much as possible, "how long have you been thinking of this?"

"Ever since that night," she replied, "when I saw my poor mother and sister lying cold and dead. I said in my heart that some day I would meet him and kill him."

"And you told no one of what was in your heart, Jennie?"

"No. The Indians would only have laughed at me for thinking such a thing."

"But why did you come to me?"

"The bell told me to come, and I felt you would understand. He hates you and would like to kill you. I thought you would be glad if I killed him."

Keith placed his hand to his forehead, while a strange helplessness took possession of him. Was this, then, the result of years of prayerful instruction of the truths he had tried to instil into her childish mind? Turning to her he said:

"Jennie, Jennie. Do you know what you are saying? Do you know it is wrong to kill? It is murder. Do you know the sixth Commandment?" he continued, pointing to the right of the altar.

"Tinjih zhigotyin rsho," repeated the girl in a mechanical manner.

"Who said that, Jennie?"

"God."

"And do you think God will like it if you do not obey Him?"

"God will understand; He killed His own enemies."

"Jennie—!"

"Anyway, He doesn't mean me," hurried on the girl, when she saw the sorrow in her clergyman's face.

"Whom does He mean, then?"

"Men, only. He says so."

Well did Keith know that "Tinjih zhigtoyin rsho," to the Indian, was "Man, do not kill," but how often he had explained that tinjih, man, meant everybody, men, women, and children. But here was a child—a child in years, though a woman in thought—who through long brooding had absorbed only that which appealed to her own case. What was he to do?

"Christ said," he replied, after a pause, "that we are to forgive people who wrong us. He said '*your* enemies,' and that includes the man who killed your mother."

"But no one ever killed Christ's mother," answered the girl.

"No, not His mother, Jennie. But cruel men killed Him, drove nails through His hands and feet, and hung Him on the cross. But He forgave them, and asked His Father to do the same."

To these words she listened intently, and a gentler look came into her face. "I like Him," she said. "He was good to little children, and loved the birds and flowers."

A ray of hope shot into Keith's heart. Was he to win after all?

"Give me the knife, Jennie," and he stretched out his hand for the weapon.

But the girl drew back. "No, no!" she cried.

"You will keep it. I want it."

"What, to-night?"

"Yes, to-night. I must kill him."

Keith arose. His face was stern. He had tried kindness in vain. The girl must be stopped by force from her mad design.

Jennie read his thoughts only too truly. She clutched the knife more firmly and, before a restraining hand could be laid upon her, she fled down the aisle and out into the cold, silent night.

CHAPTER VI

A TRICK OF COWARDS

AS Keith stood gazing in surprise upon the retreating figure, there suddenly came to him the realization of the mischief this one child might do. He felt there was a strained feeling between the Indians and some of the miners; how deep he could not tell. Should Jennie commit this crime Pritchen's followers would be only too glad to wreak their revenge upon the few natives who were at Klassan. They would make the most of the deed, and no doubt draw with them the rest of the white men. Then when the absent Indians returned from their hunting grounds, and found what had been done, their rage would be fearful, and he shuddered to think of the dire consequences.

Though this portion of the North was British Territory, yet there was no one to enforce law and order. Every man was a law unto himself, and if it came to a contest of brute strength, it would be the survival of the fittest. He believed the religious truths he had instilled into the Indians' hearts and minds would have some influence, but when their

savage nature was once fully aroused they might forget it all. He determined it should not reach such a crisis; the girl must be stopped at all cost.

Seizing his cap, he started down the aisle, and had almost reached the door, when it swung open and Amos, the catechist, entered. Most gladly did Keith welcome the native's arrival. Here was help in time of need. Quickly and briefly he told his story.

"Amos," he said in conclusion, "we must go at once, and do what we can to stop the girl."

"Gikhyi" (teacher), came the reply, "you are hungry and tired. Your cabin is warm, and some good moose-steak is ready. Do not worry any more to-night about Jennie. Leave the matter to me."

Keith's heart was touched by this simple expression of thoughtfulness. "God bless you," he said, grasping the native's hand. "I am tired, very tired. But do you think you can manage it alone?"

"I am never alone, Gikhyi," was all the answer he received, and as he looked into that honest face, and read the man's meaning, he felt rebuked for his own lack of faith.

"Very well, Amos; I leave it to you, but you will come to me in the morning, will you not?"

"Amos will come," was the brief answer, and at this they left the building.

Tired though he was, it was late ere Keith sought any rest. His mind was much troubled, and after his frugal repast he sat for a long time by the cheer-

ful fire. Pritchen was the disturbing element, and he shivered as he thought of the man. He had not expected to find him here, working havoc among his flock. His wicked, leering face stood out clearly before him. How he had changed. What a monster he had become. If Nellie knew all. If she could see him now, what would she think? His mind reverted to a sweet, pure face, and eyes filled with tears. He heard again her parting words:

"Find him, Keith; he is somewhere in the North. Bring him back to me, and to the little ones."

And he had found him,—a degraded squaw-man —with the blood of an Indian woman, and a child, upon his hands. He had seen him then, only for an instant, but long enough to receive his fearful curses ere he fled from his sight to be swallowed up by the great, silent North. He had never told Nellie, for how could he; it would break her heart. Now the villain had returned, from whence he knew not, but with intent most sinister, he had no doubt. What was he to do?

"O God," he prayed, "help me; guide me in this time of trial."

When he awoke dim daylight was struggling in through the one frost and dust-covered window which the cabin afforded. It showed him Amos sitting quietly by the sheet-iron heater in the adjoining room, which was used as study, kitchen, dining

and sitting room combined. The catechist was very still, with a far-away look upon his placid face.

"Good morning, Amos," said Keith, springing from his cot. "You are early; I didn't hear you come in."

"You slept well, Gikhyi," replied the native. "It is good."

"Amos," continued the missionary eagerly, as the scenes of the previous evening rushed through his mind, "what of last night? Did you find the girl?"

"All's well, Gikhyi."

"Thank God! Thank God! But tell me, Amos, what have you been doing?"

"I went to the store when I left you, but it was in darkness. There were voices within, which sounded like Perdue's and Pritchen's. Jennie I did not see; she was not there. I had been waiting only a short time when a man arrived with a dog team. I think he came from Siwash Creek. There's a small camp of white men there, and they come in at times for supplies. This man went into the store, and that was the last I saw of him."

"And you didn't see Jennie at all?" asked Keith in surprise.

"No, not there. When I had waited quite a while near the store, and nothing happened, I went to the Indian camps, and visited them in turn. At last I found Jennie, sitting in one of the lodges, while the

rest were asleep. Upon her face was a strange look. She neither spoke to me, nor I to her. I cannot understand the girl."

"But you will watch her, Amos," said Keith. "She may do the deed when we are off our guard."

"Yes, I will go at once, Gikhyi. But I will come back soon, for I have much to tell you about what happened last night."

The catechist had been gone but a short time when a knock sounded upon the door.

"Come in," called out Keith, thinking it was an Indian who had come to see him.

To his surprise, however, a white man entered, who seemed to be in a great hurry.

"Are you Mr. Steadman?" he at once began.

"Yes," replied Keith. "What can I do for you?"

"You're a doctor, I understand."

"Yes."

"Well, then, you're wanted bad at Siwash Creek. Jim Blasco's knocked out. Gun bust, and tore away his arm. Jim's a devil, if ever there was one, but he's hard pinched now and squaking like a baby. His cabin's the first you'll come to, in a bunch of timber. Will you go?"

"Certainly," replied Keith. "But, say, when did this happen?"

"Night before last."

"And who brought word?"

"Dave Perkins, and he travelled like he—, oh, I beg your pardon, like the wind."

"And got in at midnight. Why didn't he come to me at once? I might have been on the way by this time."

The man gave a slight start, and looked up quickly into the missionary's face, but seeing no shadow of suspicion there, replied:

"We didn't know about it till this morning. You see, Dave was so tuckered out from cold and want of sleep that he had to warm up with a drink or two, and so forgot his business. He only woke a short time ago, and swore like a—a—trooper at Perdue and his whiskey. I guess he's swearing yet, for as soon as he'd coughed up his story I left to find you."

"I'll be off as soon as possible," said Keith, throwing a stick of wood into the stove, and reaching for the frying pan.

"Now, Yukon, old boy," he continued, when the man had gone, "there's stiff work ahead. But you've been there before, and know the way, so I want you to strike such a gait that it will make Don and Hector think there's a fox ahead for sure. Brisko we'll leave with Amos to get some flesh on his staring ribs."

The dog pricked up his ears, wagged his tail, and gave a joyful bark. "Very well, master," he seemed

to say, "you can depend upon me. I've never failed you yet."

In less than an hour Keith stood girt for his long run. His face glowed with enthusiasm; his mission was one of mercy, and it thrilled his whole being. The dogs stood before the cabin shaking their bells, impatient to be away. A parting word to Amos, a crack of the whip in the frosty air, and the three noble brutes bounded forward out upon the trail, which wound through the village, past Perdue's store, and into the great lone beyond.

Pritchen was leaning over the bar when Keith sped by. "Bells!" he cried, rushing to the small window. "There he goes, boys; see him!"

Instantly a scramble ensued for a glance at the rapidly disappearing team, and then shouts of laughter shook the building.

"A drink to the fool's success!" shouted Pritchen in high glee. "Say, Sam, you're a corker. You've missed your calling. You should be on the stage."

"Did he bite quick?" chimed in Perdue.

"Ha, ha, he bit like a d— sucker. But there's one thing I can't savvy."

"What's that?"

"He knew when Perkins arrived, and asked me why he didn't go to him at once."

"The devil!" ejaculated Pritchen, setting down his half-drained cup. "How in h— did he know that?"

"Who shaid Perkins?" broke in a watery-eyed individual, staggering up to the group. "Here he-hic-ish. Watcher want, eh?"

"It's all right, Dave," laughed Pritchen. "Come and have a drink. You held the trump card this time without any doubt."

"Don't care'f I do," assented the man. "I-hic-alish holds trumps."

While the men laughed, drank, and swore in the saloon, Keith was speeding far out upon the long trail. The dogs were in excellent form, and enjoyed the exhilarating exercise with their beloved master. The moon was full, and only a short pause was made at night for rest and refreshment.

On the second day from Klassan the weather changed. The air became milder, and a dull grey sky lowered overhead. In the afternoon the wind began to blow, and ere long man and dogs were flecked with particles of driving snow. The mountain tops were hidden from view, and the storm rolled along their sides like the smoke of a thousand cannon. It burst from the funnel-like pass to their left, swept across the valley, and struck the travellers full abeam.

Hector, the wheel dog, howled and nipped Don's heels, whose teeth gleamed white at the insult. But Yukon uttered never a sound. He gave one lightning glance at his master, straightened himself out in the harness, and nosed his way through the storm.

For an hour they thus proceeded, the trail becoming more difficult all the time. At length it was entirely obliterated, and nothing remained to guide them in their onward march. The wind raved and tore round them; the snow curled and encircled their bodies like a huge winding sheet, half blinding them as they staggered on. No friendly forest was near to give them shelter. The region through which they were passing was a vast, desolate tract of burnt land. The dead trees, stripped of every vestige of foliage, stood out gaunt and weird. The wind rushed howling through their naked branches, and the driving snow seemed like the packed lances of a million unseen horsemen in a mad charge.

At length the dogs stopped and, squatting in the snow, looked beseechingly into their master's face. The small sled dragged heavily, even with its light load of blankets and provisions.

"Come, Yukon, old boy, cheer up," encouraged Keith, going to the leader's side, and patting him affectionately on the head. "I'll give you a hand. We must get out of this."

Again they pushed forward, the man assisting the dogs by means of a small rope attached to the sled. But night—an awful night—now closed down, adding its horror to the situation. A sense of helplessness shot into Keith's heart, and stayed his steps. He dropped the rope, tore away the harness from the crouching brutes, and turned them loose. Seiz-

ing the sled, he stood it on end in the snow, and taking with him only his small medicine case, began once more his hard fight. But he found it much harder now. His feet left the trail, and he sank deep into the snow. Back he scrambled, and groped onward like a blind man, searching with his feet for the hard bottom. Again and again he missed the track until at last he stopped in despair. What was he to do? Was he to perish miserably there in that blinding storm? The wind was piercing, chilling him to the bone, and he shivered.

Presently Yukon, who had been following close at his master's heels, pricked up his ears, sniffed the air, and, bounding forward, took the lead. This action aroused Keith. He believed a human habitation was near, and that the dog had scented the smoke afar off. Neither was he mistaken, for soon they reached green timber, which broke somewhat the violence of the storm.

Pushing their way through the trees for several hundred yards, a faint glimmer of light pierced the darkness straight ahead.

"Thank God!" murmured Keith, as he waded wearily up to the small log building, and rapped on the rude door. "This must be the place; the first on the trail, so I was told."

A noise of some one moving within fell upon his ear, followed by a fumbling sound as of a bar being removed. Then the door was cautiously opened,

and a big grizzly head was thrust out. Keith started back at the wild appearance, and the terrible look in the man's eyes. He had seen such eyes before in mad-houses.

"Does Jim Blasco live here?" he stammered.

"Does he? Does he?" came the deep, jerky reply. "And what if he does?"

"H-h-ow is he?" Keith could not help it. An indescribable chill was creeping over him, and his teeth chattered.

"Doesn't he look well?" roared the giant, as he flung the door wide open. "Watch'er want of 'im?"

"They told me you were hurt; the gun burst, and tore away your arm."

"Who told you that?"

"The men at Klassan."

"And who are you, anyway?"

"A medical man, and a missionary."

The man started, and his eyes, terrible before, now fairly blazed in their sockets. Torrents of oaths poured from his lips, and he sprang back into the cabin towards a rifle which was standing in a corner.

No longer did Keith hesitate. He realized his danger, and turning fled from the building out again into the night, whither he knew not, any place was better than near that raving demon with those terrible eyes. Breathless and exhausted, he at length paused and listened, but nothing could he hear except the wind howling in the tree-tops overhead.

The truth now flashed upon him. He had been deceived, tricked, the object of a huge joke. It hardly seemed possible that men with any spark of feeling would do such a thing. For an instant a fierce rage took possession of his soul. He clenched his mittened hands, his teeth ground together, and the blood surged tumultuously through his body.

"O God!" he cried, "punish them. Strike them down, or give me strength to do it!"

He paused. His lifted hand dropped to his side, and a change passed over his face. What was that he saw standing there in the storm? A form, thorn-crowned, with bleeding hands, and pierced side. The lips moved. "Father, forgive them," he heard Him say, "they know not what they do."

The scene was so vivid, and the words so clear, that Keith fell upon his knees in the snow, unheeding the curious dogs squatting near.

"Father, forgive *me!*" he cried, lifting his hands to heaven. "Forgive me, Thy ambassador, for my wicked words. I was——"

What was that? Music, the strains of a violin. He listened intently. He recognized the refrain.

"Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."

Keith staggered to his feet, and peered through the darkness, but could see nothing. He followed the sound, and ere long a square building loomed up in the distance. Toward this he feebly made his way, tottering like a drunken man, and at times beating the air with his hands for support.

CHAPTER VII

GOD'S GENTLEMEN

THE storm which twisted the forest into wild contortions, and swept the snow around the plodding outcast, beat itself in vain against Peter Martin's snug log cabin. It did its best, however, to find an entrance, but the timbers were well clinked with moss, while the door and small window were so securely fastened that not a particle of snow could gain admittance.

It was Christmas Eve, and for that reason six men were gathered together at "Old Pete's," as he was commonly called. They had travelled far for that occasion, and were thoroughly enjoying it in their own quiet way. They were prospectors, the pathfinders of the country, the advance guard of civilization. Calm, temperate, sons of Anak in size and strength, they were noble friends but stern enemies. For long years they had followed the gleaming gold through regions never before trodden by the foot of white man. Across rugged mountains,

through vast forests, and over sweeping plains, they were ever wandering, their only roads the mighty inland streams, placid lakes, or crooked Indian trails; and their dwelling places, the log hut, the rude brush house, the banked-up snow, or the open vault of heaven.

Once in the year these six men drifted together, at the Christmas season, when old friendships were renewed and experiences related. But on this occasion there was a thorn in the flesh. The miners had arrived, and with them the demoralizing whiskey. They resented this intrusion into what they considered their rightful domain. Though most of the newcomers had gathered at Klassan, some had drifted to Siwash Creek, where they had built themselves cabins and settled down to pass the long winter. At these men Pete and his companions looked somewhat askance, for they felt they were not of their class. There was one, however, old "Colonel" Radhurst, with the white hair and sad face; he was different from the rest, so they thought.

Pete Martin's only game was chess, and he loved it dearly. The pieces he had made with much skill from the hard tusk of a huge mastodon skeleton, which he had unearthed in a deep creek. It had taken him many long nights to complete the task, and each piece was the child of his own fond fancy. Alec McPherson, a sturdy son of the heather, was his keen opponent, and, while the others wrestled at

cards or checkers, these two hardy friends faced each other over the rough table.

"Check!" said Pete, after the game had continued for over an hour.

Alec ran his fingers through his long hair, and shuffled uneasily on his stool before making his move.

"Check!" again calmly remarked Pete, and a triumphant light gleamed in his eye.

"You've the cinch on me this time for sure, mon," exclaimed Alec, as he struggled to free himself from the clever trap.

"Mate!" once more ejaculated Pete, swinging up his queen, and completely surrounding his opponent's king.

"Noo for anither," said Alec. "I'm no willin' to stop yet."

But Pete pushed back the chess board, and began to place the men into the box. One by one he lifted them tenderly from the table, and when the last had been safely deposited, he rose to his feet, and standing with his back to the fire, faced his companions. This was his favorite attitude when he wished to express himself most freely. He glanced around the room with a feeling of pride, as a commanding officer might look upon a little squad he was about to lead into action.

"B'ys," he began, cutting a chew from a plug of tobacco, "d'yez know what night this is?"

The men looked up, but said nothing. There was

no need for any reply. They knew him well. It was only Pete's manner of beginning something he wished to say. On this occasion, however, they detected a new note in his voice, and a yearning, far-away expression in his eyes, as he stood before them.

"It's Christmas Eve," he continued, rolling the wad of tobacco in his cheek, "an' this is the seventh we've met together. Somehow I feel it'll be the last, fer mighty changes are about to take place. There'll be so many of them green-eyed gold grabbers in here that our job'll be gone. They'll snook into every corner, an' what'll be left fer us? I ain't as young as I uster be, and mebbe—oh, well, it's no use lookin' too fer ahead, but any way I'd like this Christmas Eve to be sorter special, jist to remind me of old times.

"Sixty an' five years, remember, have rolled over this gray head of mine, an' the older I git, the stronger some things come back. When I think of the time when my father an' mother, God bless 'em, uster take me with'm to the leetle parish church way back in New Brunswick, a lump comes inter my throat, an' a feelin' creeps over me that I can't jist describe. I'd give all I possess to be thar agin, lads, dressed in my leetle white frock, an' to hear the bees hummin', an' the birds singin' in the flowers an' trees outside, jinin' in, so I uster think, with the choir. But it was Christmas Day I liked best of all, fer then the church looked so purty with the fresh ever-

greens; the singin' was so hearty, an' everybody was so happy. Then, some special friends allus come home to dinner with us, an' after that we had games an' singin'. Ah, no, I can't fergit sich days, an'——"

Suddenly Pete paused, and his bronzed face flushed. "Fergive me, lads," he cried; "fergive me! I didn't mean t'bother yeze with all this nonsense, I wanted t' tell somethin' else, but my old tongue got away with me."

There was no need of an apology in that room. The fire in the old sheet-iron stove was the only sound heard in reply, as the flames roared up the six joints of pipe, peppered with countless numbers of holes. Pete's companions, too, were drifting, and for a time nothing was said, as they pulled steadily at their pipes. They were reticent men, these hardy wanderers, and living so much alone, their words were few. But Pete's little speech expressed their own feelings, and visions of the mistletoe, holly, and evergreens, of the big, open, fireplace, with its great log, surrounded by happy, familiar faces, floated before their minds. To one, at least, arose the picture of a little home as he had planned it, with a fair companion to share his joys and sorrows. Forty years had passed since he first rejoiced in that dream—forty years, and now she was a grandmother. But to Pete she had always remained young, the same fair face, lithesome figure, and charm of youth.

Presently he aroused from his reverie, and, going to the corner of the cabin, brought forth a quaint bundle, and laid it upon the table.

"Hello! what's that?" questioned Andy Dickson, between the deliberate puffs of his pipe.

But Pete did not reply, until he had carefully unwrapped an old blanket, and held up before the astonished men a handsome violin.

"Look at that, lads. Ain't she a beauty?" and Pete ran his fingers over the smooth surface.

"Where in the deuce did you strike that?" was the wondering comment of the others.

"Oh, she's a history, which mebbe ye'd like to hear."

"Sure, let's have it," and the men moved a little nearer, lighted their pipes afresh, crossed their legs, and settled down in anticipation of a good yarn.

"Waal, it's this way," Pete began. "Last Fall, I was wanderin' away to the east, through that Godfersaken region known as 'Dead Man's Land.' Travellin' along an Injun trail, I hit upon two men, with four dogs packin' their loads. One was quite young, an' as fine a chap as I've seen in many a day, while the other was of middle age, an' a most wretched brute. How they got together, Heaven only knows, but thar they was, hitched up in that desolate hole. They was on a kinder wild-goose chase, so I l'arned. Some fool had been thar before, found gold, made a map of the place, and then kicked the bucket.

"I saw at once thar was bad blood atween the two, an' I hated to leave the lad alone with his beast of a pardner, fer I'd taken a fancy to the kid. The mornin' I come away he accompanied me fer some distance. When we was outer sight of the camp, he placed inter my hands this very fiddle, wrapped in that old blanket. Thar was tears in his eyes when he gave it to me.

" 'Take it,' says he, 'I can't keep it. Bill kicks up sich a fuss, an' claims that he packs all the stuff, while I tote the fiddle. Ye'll be good to it, I'm sure, so good-bye.'

"With that, he was off, an' I never sot eyes on 'im agin. But thar I was with that thing on me hands. What did I want with a fiddle? My fingers are too stiff an' clumsy ever to l'arn, though I've not a bad ear fer music, when it comes to that. Then' I had a long mush to make, an' the fiddle would add much to me pack. At first I thought I'd throw the thing away, but the sight of that poor lad with the tears in his eyes, puttin' it so confidently like in me hands, was too much fer me. So I brung her along, an' thar she is. Ain't she a beauty? It'll be somethin' like old times if one of yez'll strike up, an' give us a few tunes."

Silence reigned for a space after Pete had finished his story. The violin was passed from hand to hand, though no one ventured to tune up and strike bow to the strings.

"What! kin no one play?" exclaimed Pete in surprise, when the instrument had gone the round. "Why, I have looked forward to this occasion fer some time."

"I guess we're like yersel', Pete," replied Alec McPherson, "men of action. Our fingers like your own are stiff and clumsy, better playing wid the axe, pick, or trigger, than wid sich delicate pieces o' catgut."

"Right yer are, man," assented Pete. "But I'm mighty disappinted, nevertheless, fer I did want ter hear an old tune or two."

At this, Tim Craven, a full six-footer in his stockings, stretched out a huge, hairy hand.

"Give her to me, Pete," he said. "Once I could play a little, and maybe a few of the old tunes'll float back again. I use to manage a few jigs," he continued, as he tightened up the strings, "such as 'The Fisher's Hornpipe,' and 'Auld Lang Syne,' but I'm afraid I'm all out of practice."

Then began such a sawing and scraping as the little cabin had never before heard. Had the violin been animate it would have shivered itself to pieces in a short time. A choir master, or an orchestra leader would have been driven almost insane at such an exhibition. But Tim's companions never winced. On the contrary, they seemed to enjoy it thoroughly, and tapped the floor with their great rough boots as the various jigs were reeled off.

At length the musician stopped; his supply was exhausted, and he laid the violin upon the table.

"It's all I know," he remarked, reaching for his pipe.

"Give them to us again," said Alec. "You've done fine."

"Don't ye know a leetle Christmas song, Tim?" asked Pete, with a disappointed look in his face.

"I'm afraid not. They're all I know."

"What! not one? not one leetle song, jist fer old times' sake?"

Tim ran his fingers through his hair in an abstracted manner. "There is one," he said, "I used to know, but it's so long since I've heard it, that I've clean forgotten the tune. It's something about 'Angels singing,' and 'New-born King,' but I guess——"

"I know it! I know it!" broke in Pete eagerly. "I'll whistle the air, fer I've sung it out on the hills, to cheer me up a bit. It goes this way, see?"

Tim listened, began to hum the tune softly to himself, and then reached for the violin.

"No, ye ain't got it yit, Tim; try agin," and Pete whistled it over once more.

After several efforts Tim finally rasped out the air of "Hark, the Angels Sing."

"That's her," exclaimed Pete with delight. "Now ye've got her, go ahead."

Once more Tim steered his way through the piece,

and was about to begin the third time, when a peculiar noise sounded outside.

"Hark! what's that?" cried one of the men.

"Wind," replied another. "It's a bad night."

"That's no wund, I tell ye that," said Alec, and, suiting the action to the word, he arose, crossed the room, and threw open the door.

A whirling gust immediately swept into the building, and threatened to extinguish the three candles which were performing noble duty.

"Hello! What——"

Alec's exclamation of wonder was interrupted by a snow-covered figure staggering full against him, and then falling heavily upon the floor.

Instantly every man sprang to his feet. It was enough to know that a stranger was in their midst, and needed assistance.

Scarf and cap were removed, the parka torn off, and hands, arms and legs freely rubbed. Presently Pete caught a full view of the prostrate man's face. He leaned down close for a better view.

"B'ys!" he shouted, straightening himself up; "it's 'im! it's 'im. My God, it's 'im!"

"And whose him?" replied Alec, thinking Pete had taken leave of his senses.

"Why, the parson at Klassan; the man I've told yez so much about; the chap that saved my life in Hell's Canyon five years ago. Quick, let's lift 'im to yon bunk!"

CHAPTER VIII

A SURPRISE

WHEN Keith opened his eyes, it was to see Old Pete, with an anxious expression upon his face, sitting by his side. He looked at him somewhat puzzled, but soon the recollection of his terrible experience came to his mind.

"Why, Pete," he exclaimed, "I didn't know you were here."

"Ye didn't, laddie?" replied the prospector, delighted to see his patient recover so quickly, "an' whar did ye think I'd be?"

"Out on the trail, of course, where you generally are."

"Ha, ha! Ye thought that, did ye, an' yer a parson! Waal, waal, I didn't think it."

"Didn't think what? I don't understand you."

"Ye don't?" and Pete stroked his long, white beard meditatively. "But, laddie, what would I be out on the trail fer, when the good Lord wanted me here to help a friend in need? Tell me that. Didn't

He send you, laddie, to save me from Hell's Canyon five years ago? Ye talk about them angels in the Good Book a-comin' down to arth, but I guess the Lord uses us sometimes."

"You've been my good angel to-night, anyway," replied Keith feebly.

"A queer angel, laddie," and Pete glanced at his coarse clothes, "though, I guess, He doesn't mind how a feller looks on the outside, so long's his heart's right. But, thar, I've talked too much already, an' fergot my dooty."

Crossing the room, Pete soon produced a small can, which had been heating for some time upon the rickety stove.

"Here, drink this; it'll narve ye up a bit. It won't hurt ye, fer it's only some moose-meat soup."

"Thar now, ye'll feel better," he remarked, when Keith had finished the savory broth. "When ye've had a good sleep ye'll be all right. The rest of the b'ys have gone, so the cabin'll be quiet."

"Thank you," replied Keith; "you're kind. I *do* feel sleepy, but there is just one thing I want to ask you about now."

Fire away, then."

"Who is that man living down the trail?"

"What, Jim Blasco?" and Pete's face suddenly clouded.

"Yes."

"Oh, he's bughouse."

"What, crazy?"

"Yes, an' worse than crazy; he's devilish."

"He's terrible!" and Keith shivered.

"Did ye run agin 'im, laddie?"

"Yes."

"I thought mebbe ye had, an' he's death on parsons, too."

"Why, what does he have against us?"

"Laddie," and Pete laid his hand upon Keith's arm, "his heart's bad, an' he hates what's good. Ye see sich fellers everywhar. They talk mighty big about social rights, the welfare of the country, an' the improvement of mankind in gineral. But I take notice that sich chaps, as a rule, put stumblin' blocks in the way of progress. They shun a church as if it was a pest house, an' pass on to the saloon, or places worse'n that. They see a parson comin' down the street, an' they cross to t'other side, as if he had smallpox. Oh, I've seen 'em, I've lived among 'em, an' know their actions. Didn't I see several sich curs strike a fine mission settlement a few years ago? It was as quiet an' decent a place as ye'd wish to see, but afore them wolves left, it was hell, yes, laddie, it was hell. An' ye should have heard the stories they told about the missionary; they were awful. They broke his heart, that's what they did.

"Now, Jim Blasco's one of them curs. I knowed 'im years ago, when he was fust married. He had as sweet a lassie fer wife as ever breathed, an' he

treated her like a dog, her an' the kids. The parson thar interfered, an' saved her from that devil, so that's why Jim hates parsons. When the town got after 'im, he cut an' run. He came north, an' last Fall struck this camp, half crazy. He raves an' talks about parsons most of the time. He says that they're a meddlin' lot. He cusses 'em like mad, an' I've seen 'im in sich a rage that I thought he'd have an athletic fit. I guess he'll be taken outside when the river opens, fer he ain't safe, nohow."

Keith's face flushed with anger as he listened to these words. He thought of the man who had visited him that morning at Klassan and told him the base lie. He and the rest knew about Blasco, and yet they sent him to his very door over that long trail. He glanced at Pete, and noted his strong, noble face. Here was a man, he well knew, who would avenge the insult he had received. With his five hardy companions he would march to Klassan, face Pritchen and his gang, though they were ten to one. He felt how just it would be, and for the welfare of his dusky flock that those scoffing miners should be brought to task.

There was a certain degree of pleasure in this idea as he lay on the comfortable cot, and listened to the fire roaring in the room, and the wind howling outside. Gradually he slipped away from the little cabin into the airy land of dreams.

He was again on the trail, fighting with the furi-

ous storm, and calling to the dogs. Then a mountain, sheer and steep, lifted itself across his path. He tried to scale it, but his hands slipped, and he fell back, bruised and bleeding. Through the storm he heard mocking voices, jeering and laughing at his futile efforts to advance. He saw Pritchen in the form of a huge serpent, leering forth at him from the darkness, while Perdue, Tim Murphy, and others he could not distinguish, were grinning in the background. A horrible feeling of helplessness possessed him, and the more he struggled the weaker he became. The darkness deepened, and the mountain was falling upon him. He tried to escape, but could not move. He gave a cry for help, and suddenly a light burst through the gloom. He looked, and behold a woman, beautiful in form and feature, moved swiftly toward him. He recognized the face—the face in the locket, but sweeter than ever. With a smile, she reached out her hand, lifted him out of the terrible pit, and placed him in the broad sunlight. The storm had passed, the mountain was nowhere in sight, and the jeering voices had ceased. All around were green meadows, fragrant flowers and sparkling streams. In the midst of this splendid scene stood the woman, still smiling upon him. In his joy and ecstacy he reached out his hand to touch her, but in an instant she vanished from his sight. He strove to follow, when the sound of voices fell upon his ears, and caused him to awake with a start.

He rubbed his eyes, as he looked around the cabin to be sure that he was not dreaming, for there before him, talking with old Pete, was the very woman he had seen in his dream, and whose picture was in the locket.

She was beautiful, he could see that at once. The hood which covered her head could not hold in thrall the entire wealth of her dark-brown hair. Some tresses had escaped, and the wind had tossed them across her cheeks and brow. She was thinly clad for such a night. Her dress of dark-blue serge, and a shawl over her shoulders, were little protection in that furious storm, while her hands, he noticed, were bare.

All this Keith intuitively beheld, for he was endeavoring to grasp the drift of the conversation, in order to solve the problem of her mysterious presence. She was speaking, but he could only catch the word "father" now and then. Presently Pete jerked his thumb toward the bunk, and in a louder voice, said:

"I wish yon lad was awake, fer he's a doctor, an' understands sich things. But he's been knocked out mighty bad in this storm, an' I hate to distarb 'im."

At this Keith rolled out of the bunk, and stood before the two. "Pardon me," he said, "but I have just awakened, and would like to do anything in my power to help you."

At the sudden appearance of the tall, unkempt

figure, the woman gave a start of surprise. Keith, noticing this, felt somewhat abashed, when he realized how he must look. But it was not fear or disgust which caused the woman to start. It was the picturesque figure he presented by the dim candle light.

"What a subject for a sketch," she thought. "I wish I had my pencil and paper."

"Lassie—Miss Radhurst, I mean," Pete began, "this is my old friend, Keith Steadman, an' he'll fix up yer dad if any man kin."

At once the woman held out her hand to the missionary. As he grasped it, he noticed how small it was, and rough, too. It evidently knew hard work. Holding it for an instant, and looking into her eyes, he felt like saying:

"I know you, Miss Radhurst. I have known you for days, and your face has been so often in my mind."

"Oh, Mr. Steadman," she said, trembling with excitement, "I am so glad you are here. My poor father has been strange all day. To-night he got up, opened the cabin door, and fell down the steps. With great difficulty, I managed to get him back into the room, where he now lies moaning as if in great pain. I fear his arm is broken. Will you come over to see him?"

"Certainly, I shall go at once," and Keith started for his cap and medicinal companion. "And, Pete,

you'll come too?" he continued. "You may be needed."

"Lead on, pard," returned the old man. "I'll stand by, never ye fear that." To himself, however, he said: "Thar's more'n colors here, I kin see that at a glance, an' when two gold veins meet thar's sure to be rich diggin'."

CHAPTER IX

THE NIGHT WATCH

AS Keith bent over the prostrate man, he noticed how delicate were his hands, not cramped and hardened like the ordinary prospector's. He looked upon his face, white and worn, the face of an old man. What could such a person do in the rigorous north, where only the hardiest had any chance of existence? He was not asleep, but lying on the cot, moaning in a pitiful manner. His eyes wandered constantly about the room, but seemed to notice nothing.

"Miss Radhurst," said Keith. I find what you surmised is only too true. Your father's arm *is* broken. It is not a serious fracture, however, only one of the bones, which can be quite easily re-set."

When at length the work was completed, Keith stepped back and viewed his patient.

"There," he said. "I think he will do now. We've done the best we could."

"Thank you. Oh, thank you," replied Constance. "You are very good."

"That's nothing, Miss Radhurst. I'm so glad I happened to be here to help your father. Now, you and Pete had better rest a while, as I wish to remain here for a time."

"Very well, laddie," returned the prospector. "I'll go home now." Then, turning to Constance, he continued: "Ye kin trust 'im, lassie. He'll bring yer dad through, if any one kin."

The old man chuckled as he waded through the snow to his own cabin. "They think I'll rest, do they? Waal, they don't know Pete Martin yit. Mebbe they'll see afore mornin', though."

"May I watch with you, Mr. Steadman?" Constance asked, when Pete had gone.

"Do you not need rest, Miss Radhurst? You must be tired after such an anxious day."

"No, no. I could not rest with my father moaning in that pitiful manner. He is very dear to me, and I must stay by his side for a while anyway."

"Connie, Connie," came from the sick man. "The paper, the paper; give me the paper! Don't let any one have it!"

"Yes, father dear," said Constance, gently stroking his forehead, and thin gray hair. "The paper is safe; no one shall get it, so do not worry."

The man, however, did not heed her remarks, but rambled on. "The gold! the gold! I see the gold! Look, Connie, see how it shines! We'll get it yet."

"Hush, hush, father dear." Constance's eyes were

moist as she listened to his wandering words, and watched his wan face.

"Oh, Mr. Steadman," she said, "it is so hard to see him this way. He does not know me at all."

"Gold! The trail! I see the gold! Connie, Kenneth," moaned the sufferer.

"Your father seems to have some trouble pressing on his mind," said Keith. "He talks so much about the gold, the trail, and yet he does not look like a man who has roughed it in this country."

"My father never did any mining," Constance responded. "He knows nothing about it. Oh, Mr. Steadman," she continued, after a pause, "I want to speak to some one concerning this very matter. It is almost breaking my heart. You are a clergyman and a doctor, and I know I can trust you. May I speak?"

"I assure you, Miss Radhurst," Keith replied, "that I will not only listen to your story, but I shall consider it a great honour, as well, to be thus taken into your confidence."

But Constance did not begin at once. For a time she was silent, lost in thought. She made a fair picture, sitting on the rude bench, with her right arm resting upon the table, supporting her head.

The room was bare, painfully bare, destitute of the little comforts so precious to a woman's heart. The walls of rough-hewn logs were unrelieved by picture or knick-knack. The uneven floor was as scru-

pulously clean as a pair of small hands could make it. This was kitchen, sitting, dining, and Mr. Radhurst's sleeping room combined. A portion of the building was hidden by several dark blankets, and served as Constance's own private apartment.

"What a life for such a woman!" thought Keith, sitting on the opposite side of the table, watching the flickering light of the one small candle playing upon Constance's face and hair. He admired this woman, who was living so bravely amid such dreary surroundings. Yes, he more than admired, for a sense of pity stole into his heart at the thought of her position, alone with her helpless father.

"You asked about my father," Constance at length began, fixing her eyes upon the missionary. "No, he was never a miner. Several years ago he was a prosperous business man in Vancouver. Our home was a happy one, where I tried to fill the place of my dear mother, who had died several years before. But I wished to be a nurse, and so attended the public hospital in that city.

"At the end of my second year, I was placed in charge of a man who had been terribly exposed on the trail. We did what we could to save his life, but in vain. When he learned that he could not recover, he one day confided to me a strange secret.

"He was a prospector, and had spent several years in the North along the Yukon Valley. One day he and a partner discovered a valuable ledge of

gold far back from the river in an easterly direction. They filled their pockets with nuggets, and, as winter was fast approaching, and they had little food, they started for the coast. They had proceeded only a short distance when they were set upon by several Indians, who resented the intrusion of the white men into what they considered their rightful domain. One man was instantly killed, while the other escaped. After a terrible struggle he reached the coast, where a passing steamer took him on board, and landed him in Vancouver. Here he was at once taken to the hospital, and placed in my care.

"When the man had finished his story, he gave me a piece of paper, on which was sketched a rude map of the Yukon region, describing the exact spot where the gold was to be found. I will show you this paper; it is the one of which my father speaks.

"The next day the prospector died, and I laid the map away, and thought little of it at the time, being very busy with my work. When next I saw my father, I told him the whole story, and though he seemed interested, I little thought what an impression it would make upon his mind.

"A year later my father suffered severe losses in his business, which caused him great worry. Then I found what an effect the prospector's story had made upon him. He had been thinking of it continually, and talked much with Kenneth, my only brother, about the matter. Both believed that the

story was real, and that the gold was there, only waiting some one bold enough to go for it.

"When the financial trouble swept down upon us, my brother determined to start upon the quest, notwithstanding our entreaties to the contrary. He boarded a coast steamer for the North, and that was the last we heard of him.

"Oh, Mr. Steadman," and tears stood in her eyes, "you little know what he was to me. We were so much together, and after our mother's death I took charge of him almost entirely. He had a sweet disposition, and a lovable nature. Music was his passion, and often during the winter evenings, when we were all home, he would play by the hour upon the violin, his favorite instrument, which he carried away with him. Oh, if I can only find him! I am afraid something has happened to him in this wild country, for he was not used to roughing it. Suppose the poor boy should now be lying in some lonely cabin, sick and calling for me, or—I shudder to think of it—cold and still, with the snow his only covering."

During this recital a vivid scene passed before Keith's mind. He saw again the dreary Ibex cabin, the man huddled on the floor, and the grave in the snow. That he was Kenneth Radhurst, this woman's only brother, there could be no doubt. How could he tell her what he knew? Would it be

right to add this intense sorrow to her present trouble? What should he do?"

He arose suddenly, went to Mr. Radhurst's side, and watched him for a short time.

"Pardon me, Miss Radhurst," he said, turning toward her. "Your father is resting more comfortably. Please go on."

"After we had waited for some time," continued Constance, "and no word came from Kenneth, my father became very impatient. He wished to leave for the Yukon, not only to find my brother, but the gold mine as well.

"The lure of gold filled his mind, making him a changed man. Formerly he took an interest in many things, such as religion, politics, social matters, and was a great reader. All these he gradually relinquished, and he talked of nothing but gold, and how he would obtain it. At length he determined to follow up the quest himself. We did what we could to turn him from the idea, but the more his trusty friends reasoned, the more obdurate he became. Finding that nothing would change his mind, I decided to cast in my lot with his, go with him and take care of him as well as I could.

"We travelled by the way of St. Michael, and came to Klassan last Fall in a fur-trading steamer. There we built a little cabin, in which we intended to spend the winter. But the gold fever had still a terrible

grip over my poor father. Just when we were quite comfortably settled, he had a dream, in which he saw men carrying away the gold he hoped to obtain. I really believe his mind was somewhat unbalanced, for nothing would do but that we must set out at once. We came this far, when, finding it impossible to proceed farther, we took refuge in this abandoned cabin. Here we have remained ever since, and but for the kindness of Old Pete, and several of his companions, I verily believe we should have frozen or starved.

"And you should have seen the considerate manner in which the kindness was always bestowed. Sometimes they would have too much moose-meat, fish, or grouse on hand, 'and would we take just a little to keep it from spoiling.' My father knows very little about hunting, but one day Pete took him into the woods after a moose. The animal was killed, and Pete would insist that my father had shot it, and, of course, he came in for a liberal portion of the game. I wish you knew what that man has done for us. He has——"

Constance was interrupted by a knock upon the door, and when it was opened they beheld the object of their conversation standing before them. He was carrying something in his hand, covered with a cloth, old and worn, but perfectly clean.

"Thar," he remarked, placing his load upon the table. "I knowed ye'd be hungry, laddie, after yer

long mush, an' mebbe, lassie, ye'll have a snack, too."

Constance glanced at Keith, as much as to say, "Didn't I tell you so? It's Old Pete's way."

When the cloth had been withdrawn a most appetizing repast was exposed to view. A prospector's gold-pan served as a tray, which contained a piece of tender moose-meat, nicely browned, some beans, a loaf of sourdough bread, and a pot of steaming tea. Pete did not tell that he had gone without bread and tea for weeks that he might have a little for the "Colonel" and Constance, whom he had intended to invite to his cabin for Christmas dinner. The bread he had made the day before, with a deep joy in his honest heart at the pleasure he imagined it would give the lonely ones.

"Now, lassie," he commanded, "bring on yer chiny, an' we'll have our Christmas dinner right now. It's early, I admit, but it can't be helped."

Constance gave a little laugh, but her eyes were filled with tears.

"My china," she replied, "will make but a poor showing beside your bountiful repast. However, we shall have the best the cabin affords, even if they are only iron plates and cups."

Keith was hungry, very hungry, and he did ample justice to the food. He let Constance and Pete do most of the talking, for he was busy with the various thoughts which surged through his mind. How different the outcome of it all from what he had ex-

pected. He chided himself over and over again for his lack of faith in the Master's leadings. In every step he could see the direct evidence of His over-ruling power. And, to crown it all, there was before him this sweet, patient woman, adorning the humble cabin with a true and gentle grace.

CHAPTER X

CONSTANCE MAKES A DISCOVERY

OLD Pete and Keith walked back to the former's cabin together, and left Constance for a time alone with her father.

"One of the b'ys'll come," said Pete, "an' sit with yer dad, so ye kin git some sleep, fer ye need it mighty bad."

It was early dawn as the two plodded their way through the deep snow. The furious storm of the night had ceased, and a hush reigned over the land, as if in honour of the birth of the Great Prince of Peace. All around lay the virgin snow, unsullied as yet by its contact with earth, and untrodden save by the two night watchers.

"How like my life," thought Keith. "Last night, the storm howling and raging; this morning the stillness of God. Ah, I see it clearly," he unconsciously uttered aloud, following hard in Pete's footsteps.

"Hey? what d'ye see?" asked the prospector, suddenly stopping and looking at his companion.

Keith laughed. "Nothing outwardly," he replied. "I must have been dreaming and forgot myself."

"Umph!" returned the other, and continued on his way.

"An' what did ye see out yon, laddie?" queried Pete, when they at length reached the cabin.

Keith looked keenly at the old man, but only an expression of calmness, tinged with sadness, was depicted upon his rugged countenance.

"I saw much, Pete, very much."

"So did I, laddie. I saw it, too."

"And what did *you* see, Pete?"

The prospector looked intently into the young man's face before replying.

"I saw," he said slowly, " a new trail bein' blazed out fer ye by the hand of the Almighty. Somethin' tells me, I dunno what it is, unless it was yer knocked out condition last night, an' yer rough appearance, that ye've been on a hard trail of late."

"I have, Pete, I have," assented Keith, resisting with difficulty the temptation to tell his companion all about his troubles.

"I knowed it, laddie. An' now ye've almost fergot the old trail with all its snags, because a new one lies afore ye. Ye'll find snags thar, too, remember, but it'll make all the difference in the warld when the shinin' light of a true woman lightens yer path."

"Pete!" exclaimed Keith. "I——"

"It reminds me of this cabin," continued the prospector, unheeding the interruption. "I come back to it, sometimes, tired an' discouraged. The place is cold and dismal, an' I feel that life isn't worth livin'. But when yon stove gits to wark, blazin' away like mad, purty soon things change, an' a new feelin' creeps over me. It's jist because somethin' warm an' cheerful has knocked out an' taken the place of t'other.

"Now, that's jist what that lassie over yon has done fer me. I've had a mighty bad season, an' felt like seven divils when I come back. Even the old stove couldn't cheer me up completely, an' things looked purty blue. Jist then that lassie an' her dad drifted inter this camp. We call 'im 'Colonel,' because of his white hair, long beard, an' noble bearin'. They was down to hard pan, if any ever was, an' says I to meself, says I, 'Pete, ye've got to do somethin'!' So in the doin' that somethin', an' seein' the lassie's bright face an' sunny ways in the midst of her hardships, knocked my own trouble clean outer my head. She's a woman, through and through, if ever thar was one."

"She is," ejaculated Keith, looking meditatively at the stove.

"But come, laddie," said Pete, suddenly rising to his feet, "it's time ye was in bed. Ye'll need a good rest afore the b'ys come to church."

"What! a service?" asked Keith eagerly. "Will the men come? And do you think they will care for it?"

"It's not what they care fer, laddie; but, what's yer dooty? It's Christmas Day, an' it'll remind us of old times. Some'll like it, an' some won't. But yer Orders, as fer as I kin understand, is 'to preach the Gospel,' an' here's an opportunity. They'll come, never ye fear that."

"I'll have to hold the service just as I am," said Keith apologetically. "I haven't my robes with me, and not even a decent suit of clothes."

"Don't ye worry about yer robes an' clothes. The uniform's all right on parade, an' starched collars, an' sich like, but the b'ys'll take it better if they see ye in yer rough togs. They'll feel yer one of themselves. I'll trim yer hair an' whiskers a bit, so ye won't look too savage, an' frighten 'em away."

Keith gave a little laugh. "What you say is quite true," he replied, "but it's been so long since I preached to white people that I'm afraid I'll make a mess of it. My addresses to the Indians have always been in their own language, and very simple."

"That's all right, laddie. Give us some of the old prayers from the Prayer Book, sich as 'Lighten Our Darkness,' ye can't beat them. Then about yer preachin': Give it to us red hot from the heart; that's what we want here. Trimmin's, an' fixin's, an' flowers, an' poetry, are all right, I suppose, fer

some places, whar they live on sich things. But we want straight shot that'll reach the heart, and help us up the shinin' way. An' ye kin do it, lad; the stuff's thar, so let's have it. I'll round up the b'ys, an' they'll come."

And so it was settled that the service should be held. Keith then threw himself upon the rude bunk, and, wearied out, was soon fast asleep. Late in the day he awoke and made preparations for the evening. He visited his patient, and found him progressing as well as possible, though still possessing the vacant look in his face. Constance he did not see, as she was taking a much-needed rest, while one of the prospectors was watching by her father's side.

Early in the evening the men of Siwash Creek began to arrive at Pete's cabin. They drifted in, one by one, and sat around smoking and chatting. Some did not even remove their hats, and maintained an air of indifference and lofty superiority. They had not much use for such things, so they told themselves, but, as no other diversion offered, they might as well take in what was going on.

When Keith at length stood up to begin the service, about fifteen men were gathered round him. Before he could say a word, however, Pete came close to his side.

"Whar's the lassie?" he whispered. "She should be here."

Keith had noticed her absence, and wondered, for she had promised to be present.

"Perhaps she is watching her father," he replied. "That must be the reason why she is not here."

Pete at once crossed to where Alec McPherson was sitting. A short whispered conversation ensued, after which both men started for the door.

"Don't begin till I come back," said Pete, as he left the building.

Constance was sitting quietly near her father when the two prospectors arrived. She was thinking hard, and the small handkerchief which lay in her lap was moist with tears. It had been a strange, lonely Christmas Day for her. She remembered the old times when they were all together in their snug little home in Vancouver. What a contrast to her present dreary surroundings! Then, her father was so happy, and Kenneth, the life of the house, was at his best. How her father had changed in such a short time, and the poor boy, she wondered where and how he was spending his Christmas.

She was feeling weary, too, as she sat there, for the excitement of the past night was telling upon her. The flush had left her cheeks, leaving her pale and wan. She felt somewhat troubled about having confided her story to an almost entire stranger. Would her father have approved of such a thing? But then it had lifted a load from her mind; she had shared her burden with another, and it was not

so hard to bear. Besides, she was sure she could trust that big, rough man, who looked at her with such sympathetic eyes.

"Ye'll come to sarvice, lassie, won't ye?" Pete asked, when Constance had opened the door.

"Y-yes," she answered half doubtfully, looking at her father. "I'd like to go, but I can't leave him here alone."

"I'll see to yer father, miss," replied Alec, "sae ye gang along."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. McPherson, but I'm half afraid to go, as I will be the only woman there."

"The greater reason fer ye to come, lassie," broke in Pete. "It isn't every day the b'ys have a woman among them, an' I think yer presence'll soften 'em up a bit, an' make'm think of their mothers, sisters, an' sweethearts. An' then, ye'll sing some, won't ye?" he continued in a pleading manner.

"Why, how do you know I *can* sing?" asked Constance, while some of the old colour rushed back to her cheeks.

"Know? How could I help a-knowin'? Haven't I stood at my own cabin door, night after night, an' sometimes in the marnin', too, a-listenin' to yer singin', remindin' me of a sweet canary bird penned up in a gloomy cage. An' didn't one of the young fellers up yon freeze his toes one night sittin' on the stump of a tree when ye was warblin' 'Annie Laurie'? I ain't got much use fer them newcomers, but to-day

bein' Christmas, I feel kinder warm towards'm, an' would like fer'm ter hear ye sing a bit. It 'ud do'm a mighty lot of good."

Constance laughed. She was feeling better already. "Well, I'll go then," she assented, "if you will promise to look after me."

"I'll see to that," responded Pete, delighted with his success. "I'll stand off any one, even the angel Gabriel himself, except one thing."

"And what's that?"

"It's love," solemnly answered the old man. "It's the cutest, wiriest thing a man kin run aginst. It's so mighty powerful that it'll make the strongest an' biggest chap as weak as a baby, an' the smallest woman as strong as a giant. I can't savvy it, nohow."

"I guess you will have no trouble about such an opponent to-night," laughed Constance, as she drew on her mittens.

"Mebbe not, lassie; but we'll see."

The service was short and the strangest that Constance had ever witnessed. Accustomed, as she was, to the familiar and dignified form of the Church of England, this appeared harsh, and at times almost ludicrous. Keith led off with the opening hymn of "Nearer, My God, to Thee," in a clear, strong, tenor voice, trusting to his memory for the words. He was followed by the others, those who knew the hymn giving him much assistance. There were a

few, however, who persisted in swinging off on tunes of their own composition.

"Stop yer yelpin'," said a miner to one of these vagrant singers. "Yer spilin' the show."

But the other heeded not, and with head thrown back against the wall, and brawny chest expanded, almost drowned the rest of the voices by his marvellous roars.

"My, that's fine!" he ejaculated, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with the sleeve of his coat. "I ain't heard such singing since I left the Caribou country."

"And no one else," contemptuously remarked his companion. "But say, duck yer head, the parson's prayin'."

Interested though Constance was in watching the miners, her attention was centred chiefly on the missionary. She hardly knew him at first, so much had he been transformed by Old Pete's scissors and razor. The long hair had been neatly trimmed, and the unkempt beard removed, exposing a face, almost youthful in appearance, but full of determination and strength of character. It was when the prayers had been said, the second hymn sung, and he had begun his address, that her interest became thoroughly aroused.

His subject was peace, and, after referring to the Great Prince of Peace, whose birth they were commemorating, he passed on to speak about the peace

of life. As he described a vessel beating her way through a furious storm, while the cruel waves dealt her mighty sledge-hammer blows, she noticed how stern became his face, while a bright light gleamed in his eye. But as he spoke about the peace of the harbour, with the storm shut out, and the light of home shining clearly ahead, his features softened.

"He's livin' it fer sure," remarked Bill Towser, to a miner at his side, when Keith had finished.

"Y' bet," came the response.

"An' did ye notice the power on him when he told about that ship?"

"Yep."

"Well, I tell ye it moved me mighty. I allus said thar's more inside a man than lights an' liver, an' now I know it fer sure. Hello! what in blazes is this?" he continued, looking suddenly up. "A fiddle! well, I'll be blowed! an' the parson's tunin' up!"

"Ye'll sing it, lassie, won't ye?" whispered Pete to Constance, when Keith had played over the air of "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing."

"I'll help," she replied in an abstracted manner.

From the moment when Pete had brought forth the violin and handed it to Keith for the last hymn, she had not taken her eyes off of the instrument. It fascinated her, and brought back a flood of memory. She sang almost mechanically the first verse, and had begun the second.

"Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born——"

Snap! went one of the strings, and the singing suddenly stopped. Keith moved close to the table and endeavored to repair the damage. As he did so the light fell upon a bright piece of metal. Constance saw it, and, with a cry, she rushed forward, and, stooping down, gazed earnestly at the small letters engraved thereon. Then she looked around the room, as if seeking for some special person.

In her eyes was an expression which the men never forgot, and which formed the topic of conversation for nights afterward.

"When she looked at me with those beseeching eyes of hers," said one husky fellow, "I felt that I had done something wrong, and I wanted to drop right through the floor, that's what I did."

"Well, I tell you I didn't," replied the young chap whose feet had been frozen, "I just longed to be her brother, that was the way I felt."

"Wanted to be her brother!" ejaculated the other. "And what for? Ye didn't think those pretty arms would encircle yer scrawny neck, did ye, or her sweet lips touch yer rough face?"

"I only f-felt sorry for her, and wanted to comfort her," stammered the youth, blushing to the roots of his hair, at which a hearty laugh ensued at his expense.

But Constance had no thought of the pretty picture she made. It was only of Kenneth she was thinking.

"Oh, Pete!" she cried, "tell me what it all means!"

"What's wrong, lassie?" he replied, somewhat embarassed by her searching look.

"The violin! It's my brother's! I gave it to him for a Christmas present two years ago. See, here are his initials upon this small silver plate," and she held the violin up close to his eyes.

"Waal, waal, so it is as ye say. Who'd a thought it?"

"But where is he? Do you know? Oh, please tell me!"

"I don't know much meself," and Pete scratched his head. "I met the chap who owned that fiddle last Fall, on the trail way yon East. He give it to me 'cause 'twas too heavy fer 'im to carry, so I jist brought her along, an' thar she be. Ye may keep her, lassie, if ye like."

Constance made no reply to these words, but grasped the violin firmly in her hands, while a look of hope shone in her eyes. Then she realized her position, and what a strange scene she was making before these men. The blood rushed to her face.

"Please take me home," she said to Pete, "I wish to be alone."

During this brief scene Keith was undergoing an

agony of soul. How he longed to rush forward, clasp those little hands in his own, and speak words of comfort. But he had no comfort to give, he could only bring deep sorrow if he told what he knew. Should he speak? Would it be right? Whenever the question arose, he crushed it back. No, not now; some other time. And so he watched her leave the building without one word of farewell, and as the door closed behind her a sense of loneliness swept over him, which even the presence of the miners could not dispel.

"Pete," he asked that night, as the two sat alone in the cabin, "did Miss Radhurst question you much about her brother?"

"Question me? question me?" replied the prospector. "She drained me like a force pump."

"And did you tell her all?"

"No, why do ye ask, laddie?" and Pete looked at him in surprise.

"Did you tell her about her brother's cruel partner?"

This time Pete was more than surprised. He stared at his companion in amazement. "What d'ye mean?" he demanded. "What d'ye know about the matter?"

"Keep cool, Pete. I know more than you think. Listen, and I will tell you something."

"My God!" burst from the old man's lips, when

Keith had told him the story of the death in the Ibex cabin, and had shown him the little locket. "It will kill her!"

"Now, that's the point, Pete. Is it right for us to tell her? She has enough trouble at the present time with her father, and this new sorrow will, I am afraid, break her down completely.

"Right, laddie, right ye are," groaned Pete. "But what are we to do?"

"I've been thinking of that," went on Keith. "Mr. Radhurst's condition is very serious, and he must have special and regular treatment. I can't stay here, as there is trouble at Klassan, so I must leave to-morrow."

"What; so soon?" exclaimed Pete.

"Yes, it is necessary."

"But what about the 'Colonel'?"

"He must go to Klassan. Will you take him? He has a good cabin there, I understand, and a fair supply of provisions, so he and his daughter will be quite comfortable."

Pete ran his fingers through his hair in an abstracted manner. "I'd take'm, laddie, an' be glad of the job, but I ain't got no team. An' besides, is the "Colonel" able to stand the jant?"

"In two weeks I think it might be tried. You see, Miss Radhurst is a trained nurse, and she can look after his arm very well. As for a team, you need not worry about that, for I'll send an Indian back

with my own dogs. I know it will mean a risk to move the patient so far, but if he stays here I am afraid he will die."

Pete stretched out his rough hand toward the missionary. "Put it thar, laddie," he said, in a voice that trembled with emotion, "ye're all gold."

Thus in the silence of the little cabin these two hardy frontiersmen clasped hands. Outside, the world lay cold and dismal, but in their honest hearts reigned a great peace—"the peace of God which passeth understanding."

CHAPTER XI

THE SHOT IN THE NIGHT

PLEASANT though it was at Siwash Creek, Keith was anxious to return to Klassan as soon as possible. He was uneasy about the state of his dusky flock, and especially Yukon Jennie. Amos he knew could be trusted to do all in his power to keep the girl from her terrible design. But she was shrewd and hard to manage, so it was uncertain to tell what she would do. The desire to return, however, was tinged with apprehension. He knew that Pritchen and Perdue, with their followers, would use every effort in their power to hound him out of Klassan. There were others, he felt sure, who were more honourable. If the confidence of these could be won, he might be able to overcome the opposition.

Before starting, Keith visited his patient. He found the arm doing as well as could be expected, but the racking cough still continued the same.

"Miss Radhurst," he said, as he bent over her father, "I leave for Klassan this morning."

Constance looked up in surprise. "What! going away so soon?" she queried.

"Yes, duty calls me back to my flock. They are in danger from the miners down there, and I have been absent too long already."

"We shall miss you very much, Mr. Steadman. You have been the means of brightening us up, and helping my poor father. Life to me here is almost unbearable, and I wonder how you can stay in the North year after year. How lonely you must find it."

Keith turned and looked into her eyes. "Miss Radhurst," he replied, "they have been the happiest years of my life. Until the miners arrived at Klassan my work was one of continual joy and peace, even when I was struggling with the medicine men at the beginning of my ministry there."

"But I cannot understand," Constance rejoined, "how an educated man can be satisfied to remain in such a wilderness, away from all congenial surroundings. Does not the mind become——"

"Stagnant?" assisted Keith, noticing her hesitate over the word, and a flush cross her face.

"Yes, that is what I mean, though it may seem rather a harsh judgment."

"Some think so, but that is where they are mistaken. It is here we have room and time to think, and let our minds expand. It was my good Bishop of the Mackenzie River who once said that he was

willing to devote a whole lifetime in the wilderness among the Indians, and also to the study of the Bible in the original language, which the bustle of life in London sadly interrupted. Now, during the last ten years I have studied the Indian dialect of this country, prepared a grammar, a lexicon, and have translated portions of the Scriptures, and also the entire Prayer Book, besides a number of hymns. These have been printed, and the natives carry them to their hunting grounds, and read them carefully."

"This is all new to me," said Constance. "I never thought of it in that way. But does not the bleakness of the land wear upon you, making you long for the sweet meadows and the fragrant flowers?"

"You must remember, Miss Radhurst, that it is not all winter here. We have beautiful summers, when the song birds return, and the flowers bloom on every hand. Then it is good to live in such a place, and, though I do miss the sweet meadows, yet there is much to compensate me for their loss. The forests are filled with a joyous life, where every creature, small and great, rejoices in being alive. Often those ancient words come to my mind, as I wander through the woods, watch the rushing streams, or gaze upon the lofty mountains, 'All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him, and magnify Him forever.' But," he continued, after a pause, "there is another field in which I have

worked, and because I have done so I believe I shall be able to help your father."

"And what is that?" asked Constance eagerly.

"As a medical man, I have studied most carefully the simple remedies used by the Indians in their treatment of diseases. Though at first I found them mingled with superstition, and gross rites, yet I have discovered the beneficial properties contained in the common roots and herbs which surround us. It was Nathaniel Hawthorne, you remember, who said about old Roger Chillingworth that,

" 'In his Indian captivity, he had gained much knowledge of the property of native herbs and roots; nor did he conceal from his patients that these simple medicines, Nature's boon to the untutored savage, had quite as large a share of his own confidence as the European Pharmacopœia, which so many learned doctors had spent centuries in elaborating.' "

"I don't remember the words," Constance responded, "but I have read about that terrible man, Roger Chillingworth. It's in 'The Scarlet Letter,' is it not?"

"Yes, and the words appealed to me so strongly that years ago, when a student at college, I learned them by heart.

"Well, as I was saying, I have made several important additions to my stock of knowledge while among the Indians. But there is one medicine which

is a great secret, into which I have never been admitted. Its preparation is known only to a few. There are certain traditions connected with it why the knowledge must not be divulged. It is formed of roots and herbs of some kind, and is used only on the rarest occasions. Twice I have seen the medicine administered, and each time with marvellous results. Now, your father needs some special treatment, for his symptoms are very similar to the man I saw cured. I think I have influence enough to obtain the remedy for him. Will you trust me?"

Constance gave a start, and a look of fear came into her face.

"Do you think my father is as bad as that?" she asked.

"Yes, I am afraid so, and it is important that you should leave this place, and go back to your comfortable cabin at Klassan. Pete will take you, and in two weeks' time I think your father will be able to stand the journey, if great care is used. Will you consent to this?"

For a while Constance did not answer, and Keith knew she was weighing everything most carefully, and struggling for self-control.

"Mr. Steadman," she calmly replied, holding out her hand, "I feel I can trust you, so please do whatever you think is best."

Keith took her hand in his own strong one, and held it for an instant, as he looked into her brave

face. Neither spoke for a time, but into each heart crept a joy, like a pure, fresh, dew-touched flower, tucked away in some hidden dell, with only the eye of God resting upon it.

An hour later Keith drew away from Siwash Creek for his long run to Klassan. The dogs bounded merrily over the snow, shaking their little bells, glad of the race in the keen, frosty air. Keith could hardly believe it possible that such a short time before he had plodded over that same trail, weary and sick at heart. A new life now possessed him, and he sang snatches of old songs and hymns, cheered the dogs, and at times laughed aloud at the mere joy of living.

But the travelling was hard, and the second day had closed before the lights of Klassan gleamed in the distance. The dogs were tired as they drew near the village, with their master trudging wearily behind, urging them on with words of encouragement. The trail ran close by Perdue's store, and the animals, hearing voices within, paused before the door, while the leader cast a backward glance at the missionary. The only answer he received to his appealing look was the command to "mush on," for Keith had no intention of halting there. He had advanced but a few yards, however, when the report of a revolver fell upon his ears, then a cry of pain, and a confused noise within the building. Suddenly the door was flung open, and a number of men

rushed out, and stood huddled together in a little group, talking in the most excited manner.

Feeling sure that something was wrong, Keith left his dogs and retraced his steps to where the men were gathered.

"It's hard luck for the kid," he heard one say. "He was a sharp 'un, and we'll miss him."

"My God! it's a bad rap, that," replied another.

"But he pulled his gun first, when he thought Bill was cheating, though he was too late, and there he lies."

"D'ye think it'll fix 'im?" asked another.

"Fix him, man! Did ye see the hole bored into him, and the blood spoutin' out? Wouldn't that fix any one?"

Keith waited to hear no more, but quickly turned and entered the building. A pathetic sight met his view. Lying on the floor was a young man surrounded by several miners, who were vainly trying to staunch a stream of blood which was oozing from the fallen man's neck.

Keith grasped the situation in an instant. He saw that something more had to be done, and that at once.

"Boys," he said, moving near, "that man will soon bleed to death if you don't do more than that."

"What in h— do you know about it?" came a surly response, and, glancing quickly around, Keith looked into the scowling face of Pritchen, with his

revolver still in his hand. He was standing in a defiant attitude, with his back to the wall, as if expecting an attack for the deed he had committed. But there was nothing for him to fear, as the youth, Joe Simkins, one of his own gang, had pulled his gun first. It was only an act of self-defence, and this the miners well knew.

It was a certain relief to Keith to see Pritchen standing there, and to know that Jennie had not carried out her design. But he had little time to think about it now. Stern work was on hand, and must be attended to without delay.

"I know this much," Keith replied, looking Pritchen straight in the eyes, "that if something isn't done for this man, and done at once, you will have another life to answer for at the Judgment Day, and it is not a poor, helpless Indian woman this time, either."

Stung to the quick by these words, spoken so deliberately by the man he bitterly hated, with an oath, Pritchen grasped his revolver more firmly than ever. His face was livid with rage, and his teeth ground together. Just when the miners expected to see another dead or wounded man in their midst, the weapon was suddenly dropped into its case, and, without a word, Pritchen left the building.

Silence reigned for a short time in the room, and the men looked at one another, and then at Keith. Twice now had they seen him and Pritchen meet,

and each time there had been a scene, and blood narrowly averted. What power the missionary had over the boasting bully, they could not understand, and sought for an explanation of the mystery through many a long evening's conversation in the seclusion of their own cabins.

"Boys," said Keith, breaking the brief silence, "I am a medical man, as well as a missionary, so if you will lift this poor fellow on to the table, perhaps I can do something for him."

Without a word they obeyed, and stood quietly by as he examined the wound, and did what he could to stop the flow of blood.

"Close call, that," they heard him say. "Concussion. The ball's in here yet; it must come out."

Presently he turned and looked toward Perdue. "Haven't you a private corner somewhere for this chap?" he asked.

The saloonkeeper's face was surly. "I don't want him here," he replied. "It's not my funeral. Why should I be bothered with him?"

Keith stared at him in amazement. He could hardly believe it possible that any one could be so hardened to human suffering. Before he could speak, an old man, with white hair and shaggy beard, stepped up to Perdue.

"You brute!" he roared. "You desarve to be strung up to the nearest tree. Ye're jist like most of yer set; ye strip us of our chink, and manhood,

and when we've nothin' left ye fire us out. I've a son somewhar, God bless'm, and fer his sake this poor chap'll come to my cabin. B'ys, if y'll bear him tenderly, I'll lead the way. Will that do, sir?" he concluded, turning to the missionary.

"Just the thing," replied Keith, "and while you carry him, I'll slip over to my cabin for my instruments and bandages."

CHAPTER XII

THE UPLIFT

"MOTHER!"

What more common and beautiful word than this, a mere symbol, the outward expression of the child heart within each of us. At any time it is full of deep meaning, but how greatly intensified when repeated by some suffering one in the dim morning hours, when "the casement slowly grows a glimmering square."

"Mother!"

Keith bent over the quiet form on the rude bunk. For hours he had anxiously awaited some sign of consciousness, and while the old man with the white hair slept on the floor, rolled up in his one blanket, he had kept watch.

"Mother, are you there?" and Joe's hand reached out into the air.

"Hush," soothed Keith. "You are safe, so go to sleep."

Joe opened his eyes and fixed them upon the mis-

sionary in a dreamy sort of a way, then closed them again, and soon passed off into a peaceful slumber.

Steadily the wounded man recovered under the careful treatment he received. The blankness, caused by the concussion, which at the first enwrapped his mind, rolled away as a dark cloud vanishes from the mountain's brow. Keith was much with him during the first few days. He knew the importance of keeping his mind filled with fresh, bright thoughts, and not allowing him to brood upon Pritchen and the terrible scene at the saloon. He told him stories of his experience among the Indians, and many of their quaint ways. At times Joe would laugh heartily at some amusing incident, and eagerly ask for more. Often Keith read to him a story from a book or an old magazine, and when it was finished they would discuss it together.

On such occasions, Sol Burke, the old man who owned the cabin, was always an earnest listener. He seldom spoke, but would lean forward, as if drinking in every word, and puff away steadily at his strong black pipe. "Caribou" Sol, the name by which he was generally known, was not the only one interested in these tales. Others drifted into the shack, and listened too, strapping fellows, some of them, who would remain very still while the story continued. It was in their own cabins where they gave vent to their feelings.

"By gar," said one brawny chap, "that was a

crack-a-jack yarn the parson read to-day. It tickled me, it did, about that Trotty, and his daughter. Wasn't she a brick?"

"And did ye see Sol when he read about the chap wid the kid in his arms?" asked another.

"No, what about him?"

"Why, he leaned right over, and even forgot his pipe. I never saw such a wistful look in any man's face."

"That's nothing. I guess we all looked pretty much that way."

One night when Joe was almost recovered, Keith walked back to his lonely cabin lost in thought. He had been reading, as usual, and the small shack had been crowded to its utmost capacity. For several days, as he watched the men, he had been wondering what he could do to make their lives a little brighter. He knew very well how cheerless were their cabins. Four square walls of rough-hewn logs, unrelieved by ornament or picture; a bunk, a sheet-iron camping stove, one or two three-legged stools, and a small table filled the room, dimly lighted by one feeble candle.

In addition to such dreary abodes were the long nights, the cheerless silence, with no one to care whether a man lived or died; no news from the great outside world, and one day dragging wearily to a close, only to be succeeded by another, and then another, through long dreary months. Sometimes the

men would meet together, but the cabins were all much alike. Perdue's store was the only bright spot, and there the men wandered.

Keith thought of all this. What could he do? What right had he to be a missionary, a saviour of souls, if he had no line to let out, or boat to launch in the hour of need?

Reaching his cabin, he sat for some time at the small table where he carried on his writing and translational work. His few choice books looked down upon him from their rude shelves.

"Ah, old friends," he said, looking up at them, "if you could only comfort those men, as you have comforted me, what a help you would be now."

Then it was that the books spoke to him. They suggested an idea, which, flashing along the brain, flushed the thinker's cheek.

The dogs squatting around wondered what had come over their master. Yukon poked his nose into the listless hand, while Brisko, with pricked-up ears, awaited some word of greeting. Keith heeded them not, but sat long and quietly at the table working out his new plan.

"It will do!" he exclaimed at length. "Hey, Yukon, old boy! we'll beat Perdue and his bad whiskey yet, won't we? Now, let's off to bed."

Next morning bright and early the missionary made his way to a long low log building, standing by the side of the church, and not far from his own

cabin. In this was a large stove, which was soon sending out its genial heat, and giving an air of comfort to the place. Keith looked round with much satisfaction.

"Just what we want," he said to himself. "The Indians will not need it until spring, and why should it remain here unused? A few more tables from that whip-sawn lumber, the benches repaired, and things will be quite presentable."

Then he set to work, and the manner in which he handled hammer, axe and saw proved him well skilled in such matters.

He had been working for some time when the door opened, and Joe Simkins entered. Simply greeting the missionary with "Hello!" he perched himself upon a small table and gazed around the room.

"Good morning," replied Keith, pausing in the act of nailing a leg to a rickety bench. "How's the neck?"

"First class; all healed up. My! it feels good in here, for it's mighty cold outside."

"Better than Perdue's store?"

"Perdue's store be blowed! No more of that for me."

"So you don't intend to go there again?"

"Not much."

"But where will you spend your evenings?"

"Don't know; haven't many more to spend."

Keith looked up quickly. Joe had buried his face

in his hands, and was huddled on the edge of the table. Going to his side, he placed his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Joe!"

No answer.

"Joe, you don't mean it, surely! What's the matter?"

"But what's the use of living, and dragging out a dog's existence in that wretched shack of mine, when in a second I can be free from all the trouble."

"Yes, Joe, you may free yourself from the trouble in this life, but is it manly to bring sorrow to others, and bow the heads of your dear ones?"

Joe looked up. "No one cares for me," he said, half-defiantly.

"No one? Think again. Didn't you tell me that your father and mother were living alone on a little farm back in Ontario, and that you, their youngest child, were the last to leave the old home?"

"Yes."

"Joe," Keith spoke quietly, but with intense earnestness, " they are poor and lonely. Day by day they toil long and hard. What comforts have they in life? They sit alone, side by side, during the winter evenings. They talk of you, think of you, pray for you, and wait some word from you. You, the youngest, the last upon which they bestowed their affection, are much in their thoughts. Isn't that a true picture?"

"My God, it's too true!" broke from the young man's lips.

"Well, then, which will you do, add more trouble to their lives, bow down their poor backs more than ever, and cause them to sit so still through the long evenings, and just wait from day to day for the Master to call; or will you win out here, bear the battle's brunt of gloom and despair, then in the spring make a strike, to go back home rich, to bring joy and comfort to your parents' declining years?"

For a time Joe did not speak. He was struggling hard, for the words were telling upon him. "I never thought of it in that way," he said, at length. "But you have cheered me up a bit, and if I can only stand this winter I think I can win out. It is very lonely in this camp, and a fellow gets so discouraged."

"How would this place do?" asked Keith. "How would you like to spend your evenings here?"

Joe's eyes opened in surprise. "Come here! for what?"

"To read, play games, sing, chat, smoke, and perhaps debate subjects with the rest of the men."

"To read! read what?" and Joe looked around in a puzzled manner.

"Books, magazines and papers, of course; what else would people read?"

"Say, parson, you're only joking, aren't you? Books, magazines, here in this desolate hole! over a

thousand miles from anywhere! Why we've not had a letter or one word from the outside since last summer, and now you talk about books, magazines and papers!"

"Well, suppose such a thing did happen," laughed Keith at Joe's incredulity, "do you think the men would like it?"

"Like it? Well, I guess they'd like it. Some would, anyway, for they are hungry, starving for reading matter. Didn't you see the way they crowded into the cabin while you read to me? You should see the only book we have in camp. It's a cheap copy of 'David Copperfield,' which one of the boys got from a mission station over on the Mackenzie River side, when he came in by way of the Peel. You'd hardly know it was a book at all, with the covers off and the leaves all loose. I've read it through three times this winter already, and some of the boys have read it more than that."

A lump came into Keith's throat as he listened to this simple story, and laying down his hammer he seized his cap and mittens. "Come, Joe," he said, "I want to show you something."

Together they made their way to the store room, behind the mission house, which, when they had entered, Keith silently pointed to several piles of magazines and papers stacked in one corner. Joe's eyes bulged with amazement. He rubbed them, to make sure he was not dreaming.

"Gee-whiz!" he exclaimed. "Who'd have thought it!"

Then he began to examine the treasure. "'Illustrated London News!' well I'll be jiggered! 'Corn Hill,' 'The Century,' 'Leisure Hour,' 'The Canadian Magazine,' and lots more, whole stacks of them; my, what a treat! Say, parson, where did you get them?"

"They came with the mission supplies," was the response. "For years they have been gathering there, and not long ago I was tempted to have a big bonfire, and burn the oldest ones, as they were taking up so much room. But now I'm glad I didn't."

"So am I," assented Joe. "But say," he continued, looking round the room, "what's all that stuff for?"

"Oh, they're mission supplies for the Indians."

"And you sell the stuff?"

"Yes."

"Oh, then, that's what Pritchen and Perdue meant. I didn't understand them at the time."

"Why, what did they say?" asked Keith.

"They said a lot; told what a grafter you are, that you supply the Indians with all sorts of things, take their furs in return, and are making a fortune out of them, all under the cloak of religion."

"And did they say that?" The missionary's tone was one of astonishment, and an expression of pain crossed his face.

"Yes, but that's only a part of the stories. They're stirring up the boys against you with all kinds of yarns."

"And what else did they say? Tell me, Joe."

The latter looked cautiously around, and in a low tone whispered something into Keith's ear, which caused him to start back as if from a blow.

"God help me!" he cried, placing his hands to his forehead. "Is it possible! Is it possible!"

"Yes, Pritchen told it over and over again, so I heard last night. Then he said that you killed the woman in a lonely place."

"Killed her! That I killed her?"

"Yes, and when he happened along and interfered, you struck at him with a knife, and made the terrible scar on his breast which he showed the boys."

"The brute! The brute!"

"You remember the night you pinned him over the bar, and were just going to smash his face when you saw the scar which startled you so much?"

"Yes, I remember it only too well."

"Well, he's making a mighty lot out of that, and the hard part is so many of the boys believe him."

"Joe," said Keith, "it's cold here," and he shivered. "Let us take some of these magazines in our arms and go back to the Indian school room. It's warm there, and I want to tell you something."

"Now, sit down," he said, when they had reached the place, "and listen to what I have to say, that you may know the truth.

"When I came here ten years ago the Indians were in a wretched condition of semi-starvation. They sold their skins to a fur-trading company, which sent a boat up stream for the very purpose. For valuable furs they received cheap, gaudy dress material, useless toys, and many other things they didn't need. They were being robbed right along. After a while I induced them to give up this ruinous barter, and deal with a more honest company, which agreed to send up a small steamer twice a year, in the Spring and Fall. Now the Indians have their own store, and keep those goods you saw on hand. I have never made a cent out of the business, for the natives get everything. Once a year they appoint one of their number to keep the store, and the lot has fallen time and again to Amos, who is paid by the Indians for his work.

"When a native brings in; say, a fox skin, he receives its value according to the previous year's rate. If he needs tea and sugar he is charged the same amount as was paid to the company—not a cent more. When that fox skin is sold, if it brings more the Indian is credited with the amount, but, if less, it is deducted. We have a simple yet splendid system of accounts, which has taken years to perfect. At the end of the year every Indian is given

a statement of how he stands, and so far there has been very little complaining.

"When an Indian does not wish to take up the full value of his furs in goods at one time, he is given a number of large beads, their standard of wealth, which he keeps on a stout string. Some of the natives have saved up quite an amount in this way, and in times of sickness, or during a bad hunting season, are not dependent on others.

"Then each Indian gives a portion of what he earns for the relief of the needy, sick, and the aged, besides contributing something every year to our Missionary Society. They are delighted with the whole plan, and, while I oversee the business, I get nothing. Any one who cares to do so may examine our system, and learn how straight it is. I know very well that Perdue longs to get control of this trade, and in fact did induce a number to buy from him. But that has been all stopped since my return, and so he is very spiteful. You may tell any one you like the whole truth, and how the Indians have been helped by the system."

"I shall," replied Joe, and the look upon his face revealed his sincerity.

"As to the next," continued Keith, "I shall be brief. No greater lie has ever been fabricated against a human being than that. Pritchen himself is the guilty one, and tries to shuffle the blame on me. Years ago he was a squaw-man, among a tribe away

to the North of us. I visited that band, and one day on a lonely trail found that brute who had fatally injured his Indian wife, and her babe at the breast. Before she died, however, she left that scar upon him with the point of a keen knife. The woman told me all just before her death, and gave in my charge her only living child, a bright-eyed girl, who is now at Klassan, and remembers it all."

"What! the girl here?" asked Joe in surprise.

"Yes, and it is all that we can do to prevent her from avenging her mother's death."

"Does Pritchen know she's here?"

"No, I think not. But the girl has been following him like a shadow, and watching his every movement, without as yet doing anything more. She is rather strange of late, and we cannot understand her moods."

"But why does Pritchen fear you?"

"He knows me of old, and hates me for a number of reasons. But it's not me he fears, but the Indians. He's a bully and a coward, and has a great fear of death, with good reason, too. He is very shrewd, and knows if he lays hands on me the Indians will tear him to pieces."

"Do the Indians know about him, and the deed he committed?" asked Joe.

"Only the girl and Amos, the catechist. The former for some cause has never spoken to the rest,

and I told the latter, but he is silent for the same reason that I am."

"What's that?"

"The Indians are very impulsive, and if they knew that this man had committed such a deed upon a helpless woman, and one of their own race, too, I might not be able to restrain them. They are also feeling sore over the contemptible trick Pritchen imposed upon them the day I returned, and it would take very little to cause a complete outburst. They never forget an injury or a kindness. As it is, they will spend so much time out in the hills talking about that trick that I'm afraid their hunting will suffer."

"But what are you going to do?" inquired Joe.

"Try to do my duty, and hold out till Spring. Then if he becomes too offensive, and I see our mission will suffer, I shall hold a Council of the leading Indians about the matter."

Joe leaned eagerly forward with an anxious look upon his face. "Say, parson, I wouldn't wait till Spring if I were in your shoes. You'll need their help before that."

"How do you know?"

"Pritchen will work through the miners. He'll not touch you himself, that is quite evident, but he'll cut at you in some other way. I've heard him talk; and you have no idea how he's poisoning the men's minds."

"Never fear," returned Keith. "We're in the Great Master's keeping, and He will look after us. But come, let us get something to eat. We have talked too long already, though it has been a comfort to unburden my mind. After our bite we must get this room ready for the men to-night."

"And I'll round up as many as I can," replied Joe, as they set out for the mission house.

CHAPTER XIII

PRITCHEN GETS BUSY

SEVERAL days after the conversation in the school room, Pritchen was striding along the trail, which wound through the Indian village. Under his right arm he carried his long, narrow snow-shoes, while over his left shoulder was a small rifle, pendant from which were a few plump white ptarmigan. The trail ran close to the mission house, and, drawing near, the hunter observed the missionary by the door splitting fire wood.

For days Pritchen had steered clear of his hated opponent, and had not met him face to face since the shooting affray in the saloon. His anger, which burned like a fire in his heart, had become much intensified since then by the change affairs had taken. The Reading Room had proved a success, notwithstanding his jibes and sneers, and a goodly number of men were spending their evenings there who formerly haunted Perdue's place.

"D— him!" muttered Pritchen half aloud. "I don't want to have any words with the cur. I wish I had taken some other route."

Even then he was tempted to put on his snow-shoes and cut off from the trail. On second thought, however, this was abandoned, as his purpose would be easily interpreted as the act of a coward.

With eyes straight forward he essayed to pass the house without noticing the missionary, when a deep growl close by arrested his attention, and caused him to glance quickly up. He stopped short and over his face spread a look of surprise and then fear.

The cause of this change of attitude was the half-wolf dog Brisko, who with his back to the door was growling in the most ferocious manner. His teeth gleamed white, his eyes glowed, and the hair on his back stood straight on end. Not since the terrible night of the fight with the wolves had Keith seen the brute so much aroused.

"What's the matter with the cur?" growled Pritchen, trying to conceal the apprehension he felt.

"I don't know," replied the missionary. "I never saw him greet any one in that way before. He seems to be much exercised now anyway."

Suddenly a thought flashed into his mind. He loved dogs dearly, studied them most carefully, and had read much about their ways. Was there not some good reason for Brisko's aversion to this man? Had he seen him before? If so, where? Why that look of surprise and fear upon Pritchen's face? Could it be possible that this was the very one, the

"Bill," whom that dying man in the Ibex cabin mentioned?

Lost in thought, he did not realize that he was staring hard at Pritchen, as if he would read his very soul. The latter noticed the look, surmised its meaning, and an ugly scowl passed over his face.

"What are you gazing at so mighty hard?" he blurted out.

"You," Keith calmly replied.

"Well, what do you see about me that's so interesting? I ain't much to look at."

"You were a minute ago when you first saw that dog. Why were you so surprised and startled?"

"Wouldn't anyone be startled to have a brute growl at him in that way?"

"And why did he growl? He never did so to anyone else since I've had him."

"How in h— do you suppose I know? Am I responsible for the moods of a d— mission house cur?"

"Perhaps he knows you, though, as well as I do."

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps he has reason to growl. Look," and Keith pointed to an ugly scar on the dog's side, over which the hair had not grown.

Pritchen did not reply, but stepped forward to obtain a better view, at which Brisko retreated, still showing his teeth.

"I'd growl too," went on Keith, "if I were a dog,

and met the man who treated me that way, and left my master to die in the wilderness, though God knows, Bill, that I have more cause than Brisko to show my teeth when I think of what you have done to Nellie and the little ones."

At these words Pritchen threw off all semblance of pretension. A terrible oath leaped from his lips, and his face became livid with rage.

"You insinuating dog," he cried. "Speak out. What in h— do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean about her, that sweet-faced little woman, but you think I don't know about the other," and Keith looked him full in the eyes. "I tell you I do, and that you, Bill Pritchen, robbed young Kenneth Radhurst, your partner, and left him to die in the lonely Ibex cabin. Deny it if you can."

"I do deny it, and I ask you to prove it. You can't do it, and what's more, I'll make you eat your words, and a bitter dose they'll be, too."

Pritchen was making a bluff. His speech was fierce, but his courage was failing. A fear of this strong, calm man was creeping over him. How much did he know? What had he found out?

"Bill," said Keith quietly, "just a word more. For Nellie's sake I have borne with you for some time. You imposed a mean trick upon me, of which I have said nothing. You have tried to break up my mission work, and I have let you alone. Now

I know that you are capable of the lowest degree of baseness, so I advise you to do one of two things while there is time."

"And what in h— is that?" came the surly response.

"Leave my Indians alone, or go away from this camp, and do not cross my path again."

"And what if I don't take your d— advice?"

"The answer is there," and the missionary waved his hand towards the Indian houses. "I hold the natives in leash. At a word from me they will pour in from the mountains, those cabins will swarm with life, and—oh, well, you know the rest. In the meantime touch me, and you will answer to them. As for that dastardly deed to a young partner, if the miners knew—and they will know if you don't do as I advise."

Pritchen waited to hear no more. With an oath upon his lips he sprang for the trail, leaving the missionary gazing after him with a troubled mind. Keith had thrust deep into the villain's heart. He had wounded him sore, but he felt no sense of elation, for he knew he was contending with a vile serpent in human guise.

Pritchen proceeded at a rapid pace through the Indian village, and down to the miners' cabins. He did not enter Perdue's store as was his wont, but made straight for his own log house beyond. A miserable, half-starved cur was lying at the door.

Giving the animal a brutal kick, which sent it howling away, Pritchen entered the building. Throwing his snow-shoes into one corner and the rifle with the ptarmigan on a pile of rugs, he sat down upon a small stool. His small, swinish eyes blazed, his brutal features twitched, and his hands clinched together as he brooded over the interview.

"He warned me, d— him, he warned me! Me— me, Bill Pritchen, the lawless, who never took such words from any man which I have taken from him! But I'll fix him! I'll bring him down from his high horse. He's got the cinch on me now through those d— Injuns, but my time'll come. He told me to leave the camp, ha, ha!" Then he paused, and a light broke over his countenance. He sprang to his feet. "I've got it! I've got it!" he exclaimed. "He said he'd expose me; that the men should know. Oh, yes, they'll know, ha, ha! But I must see first what's happened to that kid. I'll leave the camp. Oh, yes, I'll take your advice, my fine fellow, but I'll come back, yes, I'll come back, and then beware!"

Early the next morning he left Klassan with a small pack on his back, snow-shoes on his feet, and a rifle under his arm. For five days the wilderness swallowed him up, and then he returned. It was night when he came back, with the swinging stride and elastic step of a man who has accomplished his purpose.

This time he did not go to his own cabin, but stopped at the store. He was in high fettle when he entered the building. He nodded pleasantly to the few men gathered at the table playing cards, and cracked a joke with Perdue as he tossed off a draught of hootch.

"Give us a snack, Jim," he said, setting down the cup. "I'm dead beat, and haven't had a mouthful since morning."

"Sure," returned the saloonkeeper. "There are some beans in the pan, and I'll make you a cup of tea."

"Where's your game, Bill?" asked one of the men, looking up from his cards.

"Out on the hill, where they'll stay for all I care."

"Why, I thought you were out hunting."

"So I was."

"And found nothing?"

"You're mistaken there, pard. I found more than I expected."

"What, gold?" asked several in chorus. "Been prospectin'?"

"No."

"A pretty squaw?"

"Ha, ha. No, not this time; they're too d— scarce."

"Well, what did you find, man? Don't be so mysterious."

"I found this," and Pritchen drew from beneath

his buckskin jacket a small book, which had been kept in place by his leathern belt. "Look," he said, holding it up to view, "isn't that a find! 'Robert Browning's Selected Poems,' that's what it is."

"Oh, is that all, replied one in disgust. "Deal the cards, Tim, and let's have another game."

"No, it's not all by a d— sight," and Pritchen helped himself to another plateful of beans. "But then if you fellows don't want to hear the rest, it's all right; it'll keep."

"Come, Bill," coaxed Perdue, "never mind Missouri; all he thinks about is cards. Let's have yer yarn."

"Well, what would you think if you found a book like that miles from nowhere?" replied Pritchen, who was most anxious to tell his story.

" 'Tis queer, when ye come to think of it," soliloquized Perdue with a characteristic nod of the head. "It's very much out of the ordinary, I should say."

"And suppose you were out hunting," went on Pritchen, "and, reaching the Ibex cabin late at night, found the place looking as if hell had been let loose, and this book lying on the floor, what would you think? You'd wonder a d— lot, wouldn't you?"

"Sure," assented Perdue.

"And suppose in the morning, being somewhat suspicious, you nosed around a bit outside, and found a steep rock with two letters and a cross cut upon it, you would wonder some more, wouldn't you?"

"Y'bet," broke in Missouri, who had forgotten his cards in the story.

"Then when you saw wolf tracks on every hand, the snow all dug up at the foot of the rock, torn pieces of clothes lying around, and other things too terrible to mention, you would feel very sick, wouldn't you?"

"My God, yes!" exclaimed the men. "Did you find all that, and where?"

"And what would you think," continued Pritchen, thoroughly enjoying the sensation he was causing, "if the man responsible for it all came to Klassan and never said a word about it to any one?"

"That it looked mighty suspicious," replied Perdue. "But is there any one here who knows about the matter?"

"Maybe this'll tell the tale," and Pritchen opened the book he was holding in his hand. "See, look for yourselves; there's something to think over."

"Read it, Bill; let's have it, quick."

Holding the volume to the flickering candle light, Pritchen read the following, written in a firm hand:

"Keith Steadman,
"First Prize for proficiency in English Literature.
"Collegiate School,
"Windsor, N. S.
"Christmas, 18—."

"What, is that the parson?" asked Tim.

"Certainly, who else would it be?" replied Perdue.

Silence followed these words, and the men looked at one another. Pritchen, noticing this, was vexed and puzzled.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he blurted out.

"I don't think much about it, if you ask me," responded Missouri. "You can't prove that the parson had anything to do with that chap's death."

"But the book."

"Oh, he might have spent a night there, and dropped the book; that's all."

"But the letters, and the cross on the rock; what about them?"

"Any man might have done that. And if the parson did find a sick man in the cabin who died on his hands, he would naturally bury him in the snow, and put up some marks. It's all quite natural."

"But why didn't he say something about it when he came to Klassan?"

"Blamed if I know. Maybe he had some reason. Anyway it doesn't prove anything."

"I didn't say it did," snapped Pritchen, who was feeling sore at this man's indifference, and considerate way of looking at the matter. His elation had very much cooled in the presence of these men. They were known throughout the camp as miners who were wedded to their cards, and took only a

passing interest in the events around them. They were seldom mixed up in any quarrel, and their words were few. He had noticed that only these were in the store with Perdue, but had not given it much thought before, so full was he of his story. Now he wondered what had become of his own gang. He knew he could make an impression upon them.

"Where are the rest of the boys?" he asked, turning to Perdue.

"Over at the Reading Room," replied the latter. "There's a big time on there to-night."

"What's up?" and Pritchen's face darkened as various thoughts flashed through his mind.

"Ye needn't worry," Perdue hastened to explain. "The boys are all right. They're only after a little fun. Ye see, there's a debate on, and that's why they're there."

"A debate! On what?"

"Ye'd never guess, Bill. It's a h— of a subject. 'Which has caused more misery in the world, war or whiskey?' that's what it is."

"Ha, ha," laughed Pritchen. "They're after you, Jim. Ain't you going to hold up your end of the game?"

"Not much. The boys'll do that all right without me."

"And they mean business?"

"Who, the boys?"

"Yes."

"Sure, and I'm to give drinks all around when they're through, as my part of the fun. Ye'd better go along."

"But I'll be too late."

"Not a bit of it. Some of the preliminaries, such as the prayers and hymns, will be over, but you'll be in time fer the fun; they'll be in no hurry."

"Good. I'll go. Take care of my gear, will you, till I come back."

With this Pritchen left the saloon and made his way over to the Indian village.

CHAPTER XIV

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

THE debate was well advanced when Pritchen entered the building. The rough benches were all filled, so he stood with his back to the door among several who were in a similar situation. The chairman of the meeting, Caribou Sol, was sitting at the farther end of the room before a small table. At his left sat Keith, by the side of the mission harmonium, which had been brought over from the church for this special occasion. A portion of the room behind the chairman was hidden by a bright coloured curtain. This was a source of wonder to the audience, and aroused in their minds various conjectures.

"That's where they keep the goat," said one talkative fellow. "Don't you see his horns?"

"No, but I hear him blat outside," replied another, at which a general laugh ensued.

"But really," continued the other, undisturbed by the merriment at his expense, "there *is* something behind that curtain. Joe, the kid, knows all

about it, but he's as tight as a clam. He said the parson put it up at the last moment like greased lightning."

"Maybe he keeps his thunder there," laughed another. "I understand he's dead set against whiskey, and has some hot bolts to hand out to-night. But say, here he comes, looking mighty pleased about something."

At first the debate was conducted in a formal and orderly manner. The leaders in carefully prepared speeches opened up the subject, and received hearty applause. Gradually the men thawed out, the speaking became general, and in some cases regular harangues ensued, punctured by witty remarks from the listeners.

One of these had the floor when Pritchen arrived. He had been talking for some time about the evils of whiskey and the misery it caused to so many people.

"Think of the homes it has ruined," he was saying; "the young lives it has blighted; the prisons it is filling; the——"

"What about the snakes, Mickie?" came a voice from the audience.

"Sure, you're right there. I don't intind to leave the snakes out. And say, Dave Groggan, did yer grandfather ever tell ye where the sarpents wint to whin Saint Patrick drove thim out of ould Ireland?"

"Into the sea, of course."

"Ay, ay; into the sea, sure enough, the sea of Irish and all ither kinds of whiskey."

"Did ye ever see them, Mickey?"

"See thim? Haven't I seen thim, and if you drink enough of the stuff ye'll see thim too."

The laugh which followed this remark was silenced by the chairman rising to his feet. He rose slowly, and stood for a time with his hands upon the table. He was a man to be noticed in any company, with his tall, gigantic figure, thin gray hair, and long white beard. His faded eyes looked calmly over the heads of the men before him while waiting for the noise to subside.

"B'ys," he began, "I ain't used to makin' speeches, but I must say a few words to-night. Ye've talked about the miseries of war an' whiskey. Ye've brought forth facts an' figures a-plenty, but ye don't seem to be in earnest."

"What are ye giving us, Sol?" spoke up one.

"Ye may think what ye like, but if you'd been through the furnace as I have ye'd not make so many jokes about whiskey. Ye'd speak from yer hearts, an' then ye'd be in earnest, never fear. Look at me, b'ys, the oldest man here, an' when I heered one young chap boast that to drink moderately was no harm, I trembled fer 'im. I thought so too once, an' I said so to Annie, my wife, God bless her. I

can't make a long speech in eloquent words, but I jist want to show yez a page from an old man's life."

"What, a sermon?" asked one of Pritchen's gang, who was getting restless and anxious for something exciting to happen.

"Mebbe a few sarmons wouldn't hurt ye," and Sol fixed his eye sternly upon the young man.

"As I was a-sayin'," he continued, "I want to tell yez somethin'. When I was fust married me an' Annie were as happy as any couple in—oh, well, ye'd better not know whar. We had a fine farm, snug house, and good-sized barns, with kind neighbours a-plenty. By the time our two little uns were born we had laid by a neat sum of money.

" 'It's fer Danny an' Chrissie, to eddicate 'em,' says Annie. An' oh, b'ys, I remember the last time she laid any away. I had come back from town, whar I had sold my load of produce, an' I handed her what money I had. She looked at it an' then at me kinder scared like.

" 'Sol,' says she, 'is this all? An' what's the matter with ye? Ye've been drinkin'!'

" 'Only a few drops with the b'ys, Annie,' says I, but I didn't tell her it had been a-goin' on fer some time.

" 'Don't ye do it any more, Sol,' says she. 'Remember the little uns, an' '—then her voice kinder quavered, 'the habit may grow upon ye.'

"I laughed at her—yes, I laughed then, but oh, God, b'ys!" and the old man leaned over the table with a look of agony in his face, "I ain't laughed since! Would any of yez laugh if ye'd left a wife like Annie, an' such sweet wee uns fer the devil whiskey? If it had lost ye yer farm, home, respect of all, and drove ye away a drunken sot?

"After a while a bit of my manhood returned. I swore I would make good agin, an' with that resolve I worked in a lumber camp. With feverish energy I swung the axe an' handled the peevie till my name was known fer miles around. My wages I did not spend, as did most of the men, in gamblin' an' drinkin', an' at last I went to town to send the money to my wife. Then, may God fergive me, I fell. But what could I do, with rum shops starin' at me from every corner, doggin' my very steps, allus allurin' me, an' the men coaxin' me on all sides?"

"I'll take jist one glass," says I, "an' no more.

"But that was enough, an' when I sobered up my money was all gone."

"And brains too," jeered some one from the back of the room.

"Ah, yer wrong there," calmly replied Sol. "I didn't have any to lose or I wouldn't have acted the way I did.

"I fled from the place. I wandered, ever wandered, God knows whar. I struck minin' camps,

worked like a slave, an' spent my wages to satisfy the devil within me. But once I let up. A young chap, the parson of Big Glen, reached out a hand an' gave me a lift. He stuck to me through thick an' thin. He made me feel I was a man, till down I went agin, an' I ain't seen 'im since.

"One day, after a drunken spree, an old paper from my own town somehow drifted into my hands. Here is a piece of it. Look," and Sol held up a small note book, with a clipping pasted on the inside. "See the headin':

" 'Died in the Poor House!'

"It was my Annie! the trimmest lass an' best wife a man ever had. An' what did it, b'ys? I ask yez that. What did it? Whiskey, that's what did it, an' ye'll joke about it, an' say it doesn't hurt to take a drop now an' then."

"He's a weak fool who can't," spoke up Pritchen. He was not satisfied at the silence which followed when Sol finished, and the impression he had made upon the men.

"Weak fool! Weak fool, did ye say?" returned Sol. "But mebbe yer right when I come to think of it. An' I guess thar are many more of us who are weak fools, too, fer what do we do? Walk right into a saloon an' see writin' there plainer than on

the walls of Bill Shazzar's palace, which doesn't need a Dann'l to tell its meanin', either."

"I never saw any writing on saloons," sneered Pritchen. "You've had the D. T.'s, old man, that was the trouble with you. What you thought was writing was nothing but snakes."

"Ye see, b'ys," continued Sol, ignoring Pritchen's thrust, "the words, 'Homes Ruined Here,' 'Disease, Insanity, an' Murder Found Here,' 'This Way to the Poor House an' the Grave.' That's what we see, an' yit we walk right in an' buy with them words a-starin' us in the face."

"You're a d— fool and a liar," shouted Pritchen, at which his men set up a roar, delighted to know that something was about to happen.

Caribou Sol started; the colour fled from his face, and with one bound he leaped forward, scrambled over the seats, and confronted the man who had dared to use such insulting words.

"Take 'em back!" he cried. "Take back them words, or by heavens I'll pin ye to the wall!"

Pritchen was taken by surprise, it was easy to see that. He had reckoned on a disturbance, but had not expected the sudden action of Caribou Sol. Inwardly he cursed his men for their slowness in stirring up the meeting. He wished to remain in the background in order to further his future designs. But with this towering form confronting him matters assumed a different aspect. He shrunk back

from those blazing eyes, but only for an instant. It would not do to show any sign of weakening in the presence of the miners.

"To h— with you!" he cried. "Do you think I'm a dog? I mean all I give, and I give more than words."

Quick as lightning his hand slipped to his hip pocket, a revolver flashed for an instant in sight, and then whirled through the room to strike heavily against the opposite wall, while Pritchen staggered back, and sank heavily to the floor, felled like an ox by one blow of Caribou Sol's clenched fist.

Instantly an uproar arose. Pritchen's followers with a cry of rage surged forward and bore down upon the gray-haired giant, while the rest of the men sprang to his assistance.

So quickly had everything taken place that Keith stood dumbfounded. He had noticed the presence of Pritchen and his gang, and felt rather uneasy as to their purpose in attending. But as time passed and nothing happened he hoped that the debate would end quietly. Now, instead of peace, a general fight was on. Blows were being exchanged, cries and curses were ringing through the room. It must be stopped. He leaped over the benches and besought the assailants to desist, but his voice was drowned in the general clamour.

"Oh, God," he mentally prayed, "help me, tell me what to do to stop these brutes!"

And even then his prayer was answered. The commotion gradually subsided. The men, some with faces scratched and bleeding, were staring in one direction as if they saw a ghost. Keith looked, too, and instead of a ghost he beheld the trembling form of Constance Radhurst.

In the moment of excitement he had forgotten her, and when he saw her standing there on the rude platform before the curtain, in the presence of those rough men, he was tempted to rush up and lead her gently away. A groan almost escaped his lips. What a different ending to the debate from the one he had expected. It had been planned that Constance should appear, but only as a pleasant surprise, to sing some old songs when the debate was over. He had taken a step or two towards the platform, when in a clear, rich voice Constance began to sing:

"Come, sing once more to-night, my lads,
Come, sing some old refrain,
Of love, of home, of childhood days,
And live them o'er again.

Chorus:

"We've drifted far away, ye ken,
From home and kith and kin,
Fling open wide your hearts to-night,
And let the old times in.

"Put strife aside, and banish care,
And sink them out of sight,
Oh, comrades of the weary trail,
Be brothers for to-night!

Chorus.

"And then let fall whate'er betide,
The trail be steep and long,
We'll quicker step and keener fight,
Cheered by some old, sweet song."

Chorus.

It was but a simple song which Constance and Kenneth had often sung together in the good old happy days. She little realized then to what purpose it would one day be used. But with the men the words affected them not so much as the sight of that sweet face, whiter than it should be, and the trim figure on the platform. Into many a mind flashed the memory of other days.

For an instant there was silence when Constance ended. Then, "Three cheers for the lady," shouted one strapping fellow. "Three cheers," came the response, and how their voices did ring as they roared and stamped their approval.

Keith in the meantime had taken his place at the harmonium, and when the men's voices had died down he played the air of "Annie Laurie." With Con-

stance leading, and the miners joining in the chorus, it was a time never to be forgotten at Klassan.

Pritchen was a surly witness of this marvellous transformation. Regaining his feet, he tried to speak to his men. But they had forgotten him in the new excitement. They were in a rollicking humour, these husky fellows, who but a few minutes before were tearing at one another in the wildest confusion. In his anger Pritchen seized one by the shoulder.

"D— you!" he shouted. "What's wrong with you all? Are you going to let a bit of lace turn your heads?"

The only response he received was the man wheeling square around, and bawling full into his face:

> "And for bonnie Annie Laurie,
> I'll lay me doon an' dee."

"Curse you all!" he cried. "You confounded idiots!" and in a rage he left the building and started for Perdue's store.

The sound of the last verse followed him into the darkness, and then silence. He stopped and listened. Presently there floated through the air the old, familiar tune of "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." All were singing it, he could easily tell that, and his men, too! He turned and shook his fist at the building.

"My time will come!" he cried. "You d— missionary! I'll get even with you! You may laugh at me now, but beware!"

CHAPTER XV

THE SUMMONS

THE morning after the debate Constance was moving briskly about the little cabin she had assisted in erecting with her own hands. She was relating to her father, who was lying on a cot, the stirring scenes of the previous evening.

"Oh, it was so funny at first to listen to the strange things some of the men said. They were like a lot of school boys. But there was one old man who spoke so earnestly when he told about his past life that I could not keep back the tears from my eyes."

"And you were behind the curtain all the time?" questioned her father.

"Yes, until the row began. At first I felt like running out of the building by the door which was near, I was so frightened. But when I saw the efforts Mr. Steadman was making to stop the fight I seemed like a coward for the thought of deserting. For a few minutes I did not know what to do. Then I

remembered a story I had read long ago, how an angry mob was stilled by a song, and I made up my mind to try it on those men. I could hardly stand at first, my knees were so weak, and I trembled violently. But when I saw the effect the song produced I took courage and had no more trouble."

"My dear, brave child," responded Mr. Radhurst affectionately, "you remind me of your mother; you have her disposition, so brave, and yet so kind and gentle."

"Not very brave, daddy, but I would do anything for you," and Constance gave the old man a loving kiss. "If I am gentle it is you who made me so; you are always so considerate."

"But tell me, Connie, how it all ended. I am anxious to hear some more."

"Oh, we sang hymns and songs the rest of the evening, and then those great, rough men came up one by one and shook hands with me. Some of them, I really believe, had not shaken hands with a woman for years, as they just wabbled my hand, and then dropped it as if they were frightened. But the old man with the white hair and long beard squeezed my hand till I nearly cried out with pain. The tears rolled down his cheeks as he looked into my eyes and said, 'God bless ye, lady, ye've done us a power of good to-night.' "

"Mr. Steadman must have been pleased, Connie, at the happy ending."

"Happy? I don't believe I ever saw such a look on any man's face before; it fairly shone with delight. He looked at me and tried to express his gratitude in suitable words, but I never heard a man stammer so in my life. He gave up the attempt at last, and simply said, 'Thank you!'"

"Did he say he would come this morning to see me?"

"Yes, as soon as he could, and I believe that's his step now."

"I am afraid I am very late," said Keith, when he had entered the building, "but you see I've been delayed."

"Overslept yourself?" laughed Constance.

"Oh, no. I've been to the drug store."

"The drug store!"

"Yes, and found the druggist asleep. When I awoke him it took me two whole hours to get what I wanted. How is that for business?"

"A drug store! and a druggist! I don't understand," and a puzzled expression spread over Constance's face.

"Well, you see, it's this way. I left Pete asleep, as he was tired after his long trip, and went to get the roots of which I told you at Siwash Creek. I found the old chief asleep, and when he was awake and I told him what I wanted it took me one hour to answer all the questions he asked. Then he made a long speech about his ancestors, and how the won-

derful roots had cured so many of them. By the time he was through another hour had slipped by. But at last I got what I wanted and here it is, so I am going to begin at once upon that racking cough."

"Mr. Steadman," said Constance, "will you please tell me where all these things came from which we found in this room?"

"What things?" queried Keith, as he carefully unwrapped the precious roots from their thin bark covering.

"Why, this splendid bear-skin rug on the floor; that large wolf skin on my father's cot, and those pictures on the walls; they do not belong to us."

"Do you mind very much, Miss Radhurst? If you are offended I'll take them away, for it was I who brought them here."

Receiving no reply, he continued: "When I came to light the fire, so as to have the building warm for your arrival, I noticed how bare the room looked, and turned over in my mind how to improve its appearance, and so brought these over. That bear-skin rug is from one of the finest grizzlies ever seen in the North. I brought him down one morning when he was about to make a breakfast of me."

Keith did not tell that in killing the animal he had risked his own life to save an Indian youth, who was in the creature's grip. The lad was a stranger to him, and when he was released he gave one quick, searching glance of gratitude at the missionary and

then sped like a deer up the long, deep ravine. He had never seen the lad since, but his bright face and manly figure were often in his mind.

To Keith, the days that followed were full of peace and happiness. The Reading Room was well attended and, more important still, the church was filled every Sunday with an orderly number of men. It now appeared that the turn of affairs on the night of the debate had discouraged Pritchen entirely from his opposition.

Keith became a regular visitor at the Radhurst cabin, and Constance always awaited his coming with pleasure. They read aloud from some favourite author, during the long evenings, when Mr. Radhurst was an eager listener until he fell asleep.

"I wish I had my copy of Browning," said Keith one night, "but I have lost it somewhere. I had it on the trail, and well remember the last time I read from it. It was in an open camp, where I must have left it."

"He seems to be your favourite author," replied Constance.

"One of my favourites. He deals with the deep, serious things of life, and has such a virile faith."

One afternoon, instead of reading, they went out for a short snow-shoe tramp. The day was clear and fine, and the myriads of snowy crystals gemmed the whole landscape with surpassing glory. They climbed the hills, chatting like happy children, while

at times their voices rang out in joyous peals of laughter. When they returned to the cabin their faces glowed with the keen exercise, and Keith, looking at Constance, thought he never beheld a fairer picture of health and beauty.

"You will come in to see father," she said, when they had reached the door.

"No, not to-day, thank you," Keith replied. "I have had so much enjoyment this afternoon, that I feel quite intoxicated. I must get back to my cabin and do some translationary work. Spring will soon be here, so I want to get the task finished and off in the first boat."

Keith had been engaged for some time upon the Psalms, and had reached the one hundred and twenty-first. Generally it was easy for him to concentrate his mind upon his task, and hours would slip quickly by. But to-day it was different. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," he began, and then tried to write. Instead of the Indian words slipping from beneath his pen, he found himself sketching a fair face upon the white sheet before him. So absorbed was he at this pleasant occupation that time moved unheeded by. He was at length startled by a loud rap upon the door, and quickly turning the sketch face downwards upon the table called to the visitor to come in. At once a young man entered, and cast a curious glance around the snug room.

"Mr. Steadman," he began, "you're wanted at the

store. There's trouble on hand. Tim Fleeters had a poke of gold stolen from his cabin, and a miners' meeting has been called to see what's to be done."

"Certainly I will go," replied Keith. "Will you wait for me?"

"No, I must hurry on; I have more calls to make," and with that he was away.

Before leaving, Keith lifted the drawing from the table and placed it in a strong chest in one corner of the room.

"There, if anyone should enter during my absence nothing will be left to tell how I have spent the afternoon."

As he moved along the path leading to the store, Pritchen crept out from behind an adjacent building and watched the missionary until his tall figure was out of sight. Then with a low chuckle he moved towards the light shining through the window from the candle which Keith in his hurry had forgotten to extinguish. Drawing near he peered cautiously into the room, but could observe no one within. To be surer, he knocked, and, receiving no response, opened the door and entered.

"Ha, ha," he muttered half aloud, as he glanced swiftly around the room. "Snug place this. Nice books there. But you'll learn something soon, my hearty, not found in those pages. Now a place for these."

As he spoke he drew from beneath his coat a

heavy poke of gold, and also an empty one, on which appeared the two letters, "K. R." Presently his eye caught sight of the chest.

"That looks good; a most likely place, so in you go."

Lifting the cover, which was not locked, he beheld the picture lying in full view.

"Hello! what in h— is this? A picture, and a woman's! It's too dark here to see clearly. I must have more light. Ah, now I see," and he held the candle close down to the chest. "Well, well, I didn't know it had gone that far, but it only makes bigger game for me. Down underneath is the place for these, snug away in that corner, beneath this stuff. There, that's good."

No sense of shame or pity struck the villain's heart, as he gave one more swift glance at the sweet face before him ere he slammed down the cover. Then locking the chest he was about to put the key into his pocket.

"No, that won't do," he thought. "The stove's the best place for you. There, down among the coals and ashes, away out of sight."

He then started to leave the building, and had almost reached the door, when his eye fell upon a picture standing upon the rough deal table. He stopped and went back. The photograph was that of a sweet-faced woman and two lovely children, a boy and a girl.

Pritchen looked at them curiously for an instant. "Long time since I've seen you, Nellie. I expect you don't look so young and fresh now, and the kids must be well grown up. Here's to the d— breed, with all their saintly, pious ways. I'm done with you all—all except one, by God, and he'll soon be finished."

Seizing the picture in his hand, he tore it to pieces, threw the fragments into the stove, and, turning, left the building.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MINERS' MEETING

OF all criminals in the unwritten code of mining camps in the early days in the Yukon, the sneak-thief was the most despised. A man might live as he pleased, as a squaw-man, or with several paramours; he might shoot a man down in his tracks, if for honour or self-defense. But for a man who robbed sluice boxes or stole from cabins there was no term of condemnation strong enough in the English language. Cabins in those days were seldom locked, and a man who secured his door at night, or when he left the place, was viewed with suspicion, and often shunned. Anyone might enter another's abode, borrow what he needed, and, if hungry, help himself. It was the law, the unwritten verdict of the place.

When Keith reached the store he found most of the men congregated there, discussing the whole affair in no light terms. Some were sitting on rude benches, others were standing. The room reeked with tobacco and whiskey fumes. As he gazed

around and noticed how the scent of blood had aroused their passions, a sigh escaped his lips. A number who at the debate had talked the strongest about temperance, who were so quiet in the Reading Room, and orderly in church, were among the most vehement talkers, and expressed their views in the strongest manner.

They reminded him of a certain Sunday School class in his old home town. When separated each was quiet and manly, a typical little saint, who said "yes, sir," and "no, sir," most carefully, and could tell about Moses and David with evident pride. But when together, the mob instinct seemed to possess them, and to carry them beyond all bounds of reason in thought, word and deed.

As he listened to these miners and heard their rash remarks he shuddered. "God help the poor fellow!" he thought, "whoever he may be, if he once gets into such brutish hands."

"Yes," he heard Tim Fleeters saying, "it was only yesterday that I went out to cut fire-wood. The poke of gold was in my chest, at the foot of my bunk. When I returned, and lifted the lid to get some tea which I kept there, the poke was gone—gold and all."

"The sneak!" spoke up another, "shooting's too good for him."

"Hanging would be better," remarked a third. "Shooting'd be a cinch."

In the meantime the rest of the men had arrived, among whom was Pritchen, and joined in the conversation.

There were several miners in the room calmer than the rest, of whom Caribou Sol was one. He had watched the whole proceedings, and listened to the talk as it drifted along. Seeing that nothing definite was being done, he at length rose slowly to his feet, and mounted the bench on which he had been sitting.

"B'ys," he began, rolling a wad of tobacco in his cheek, "let's git down to bizness. We've met here, as I understand it, to see about that poke of gold, and all the talk seems to be about what to do with the thief. Now, who is he, and how are we to find him? I suggest that fust of all we appoint a chairman to this here meetin', an' git down to bed rock."

"Right ye are, Sol," said one, "and I move that you take the chair, or, I should say, bench."

"Hold right thar, pard," broke in the old man. "I don't want that persition, an' I won't take it. Appint some one else."

"Pritchen, then," called out another. "I move for Pritchen."

"Pritchen, Pritchen," came the response. "He'll do. He's the tongue for such things. Mount the bench, Bill."

Since the night of the debate Pritchen appeared to be a changed man. Instead of making a big

fuss over the affair he had laughed it off with the men, and even shook hands with Caribou Sol. "It was only a little racket," so he told them, "and the sooner forgotten the better." He occasionally went to the Reading Room, and one Sunday attended church. The men declared that Bill was "the clear stuff," after all, so agreeable did he make himself to every one who came in his way. It was therefore quite natural that he should be chosen chairman on this occasion.

A half smile played around his mouth as he complied with the miners' request. He was much pleased with the result so far, and looking from his elevated position, a contemptuous feeling for the men around him came into his heart. "What curs they are," he said to himself, "to be led first one way and then another. But a short time ago they were ready to drive me out of Klassan; now they have chosen me chairman. Oh, what great things a little oil will do to make human machines run smoothly. I guess I've applied it all right this time. My forbears didn't lick the Blarney stone in old Ireland for nothing, I see that for sure."

"Boys," he began very deliberately, "I thank you for this honour. Anyone else would make a far better fist at it; though I shall do the best I can. It is in the interest of the community that this serious problem before us should be considered as carefully and promptly as possible. The meeting is now

open for discussion as to the best manner of proceeding."

"Let's turn out and search every cabin," suggested one.

"No, that won't do," replied another. "The thief may search his own shack, and laugh up his sleeve at us."

"But we could divvy up," insisted the other. "Several go in a bunch, and then there'd be no danger."

Caribou Sol listened attentively to the various remarks which were made. Seeing that no solution of the difficulty was being reached, but rather a greater complication, he slowly rose and looked around.

"B'ys," he commenced, "if yez don't mind listenin' to an old man, one who has been through the mill, and seen sich things afore, I'd like to offer a suggestion."

"Go ahead, Sol," responded several, for they knew the old man only spoke when he had something important to say.

"Now, I've been in several camps sich as this, where there's no one sich as magistrate or policeman to enforce law an' order. Then the miners had to take matters inter their own hands."

"How did they do it?" asked one.

"Ye may be sure they didn't leave it fer every ninny to take up valuable time waggin' his tongue,

an' sayin' nothin'. They ginerally got down to bizness as soon as the camp was formed, an' appinted several of the leadin' men to dispense law as they saw fit. Sometimes they were called 'The Vigilance Committee,' an' right good work they did, too. They had their eyes peeled fer bizness, ye bet yer life."

"Tell us, Sol, how they chose them," asked Perdue.

"Sometimes by vote, either by ballot or show of hands."

"Was it ever left to the chairman to appoint them?" continued Perdue. "I should think that's a much easier way, and I suggest that we do the same."

"Hear, hear!" came the response. "Go ahead, Bill. Name yer men, and let's get this business fixed up."

Pritchen's eye gleamed with a triumphant light at this turn of affairs. He made a show of refusing such an important task, but the men would not listen.

"Come, man," said Perdue, "stick to yer job. Ye kin do it, and all 'ill be satisfied."

"Well, if you want me to do it," replied Pritchen, "you'll have to put up with my choice. I'll do the best I can, and I want no back jaw when it's done."

"All right, Bill, never fear. Go ahead."

Pritchen looked slowly round the room as if weighing each man carefully in his mind.

"Mickie O'Toole," he said, "will you stand by and help with this job?"

"Sure," came the reply. "To the very last."

"And find the rope too, Mickie?" laughed one.

"If you're the thafe, begorra, I'll find the rope, tie the knot, and give the first pull."

The laugh which followed this repartee showed that the men were in excellent humour, and enjoying the whole proceedings.

"Tim Slater, I spot you," continued Pritchen. "Is it a go?"

"Very well, pard, ye may bank on me," came the reply.

"Jim, how does your pulse beat?" and Pritchen threw a wink at Perdue.

"Leave me out, Bill. It's hard fer me to git away. Choose some one else."

"Ah, come off, Jim," remonstrated Mickie. "If I tie the knot you'll need to brace the poor divil up a bit with a dram or two of yer hot stuff."

"Guess he won't need the rope, then; the stuff'll fix him," came a voice from the back of the room.

Perdue craned his neck, and stood on tip-toe to see the speaker, while his flushed face told that the thrust had gone home.

"Never mind him, Jim," laughed one of the men. "It's only Joe, the kid, having a little fun."

"It's d— poor fun, then," surlily replied the saloonkeeper. "Yes, Bill, I'll jine ye, if my help'll do any good to round up the beast, and mebbe there's more'n one."

"You ought to know," again came the voice.

Perdue was furious. He was about to give vent to his feelings in no uncertain language, when Pritchen laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Be quiet, Jim, and never mind the cur. Let's get on with our job. I choose the parson," he continued, looking the missionary full in the eyes.

Keith started as he heard his name mentioned. He had been standing silently in a corner, watching with disgust the way in which the business was being conducted. He noticed that the men chosen were Pritchen's tools. Why had the chairman selected him?

"I would rather not act," he quietly replied. "Please appoint some one else."

"Ye'd better do it, parson," urged Caribou Sol. "A chaplain may be needed, an' ye'll be mighty handy."

A peculiar note in the old man's voice and the look in his face placed Keith on his guard. "Yes, I may be needed," he thought. "If some poor chap gets into the hands of those brutes it will be well to see that fair play is given at any rate."

"Very well, then, I agree," he assented after a short pause.

Pritchen noted how quick Sol was to persuade Keith to accept, and the look upon his face, so the little scene pleased him immensely.

"Now, gentlemen," he announced, "I think one

more will do. Five should make a good number. Let me see," and he hesitated as he looked around the room.

"What about yourself, Bill?" spoke up several. "You'll do."

Pritchen made a pretence at remonstrating, but the words were drowned in the noise of the miners, who stamped, clapped, and shouted until the clamour was deafening.

"All right, then," he replied, when the tumult had subsided. "If you are as determined as that, I suppose I must act. Let us now get to work," he concluded, stepping down from the bench.

Keith had been thinking very seriously during all this time, and when Pritchen ended he lifted up his voice.

"Gentlemen, you have placed upon us a hard and important task, and as one of the Committee I wish to ask a few questions."

The men giving him respectful attention, he proceeded:

"Suppose one of us on the Committee should be the guilty person, what are we to do?"

"Choose another," came the reply.

"Is that the will of all?"

"Ay, ay."

"And, if we find the thief, have you any suggestions to make? It may help us very much."

"Hang him," said one.

"Drive him from Klassan," replied another.

"Let the Committee decide," spoke up a third, which remark was received with applause.

"Thank you, gentlemen, that is all," and with this Keith joined the men who were waiting for him at the door.

As they passed out into the night, Caribou Sol dropped his head, and his long beard was pressed close against his breast.

"Fool, fool, that I am!" he said to himself. "Why did I refuse to act and thus leave 'im alone with that devil an' his tools? I might have knowed it. I might have knowed it. Somethin' will happen. Somethin's in the air. I don't know what it is, but when that sarpent gits to wark thare's bound to be trouble. God fergive me!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SEARCH

A STIFF breeze was swinging through the night as the Vigilance Committee left the saloon and started for the nearest cabin. The stars were hidden, and the weather had moderated, presaging a storm. The wind was soughing in the trees like a wandering spirit, while far in the distance the faint howl of a wolf was heard. The line of rough buildings stood indistinct in the darkness, unrelieved by one ray of light. They sent a chill to the hearts of several of the men by their gloomy silence. In one of these, perhaps, the stolen treasure was lying, the innocent cause of the disturbance.

It had been arranged that the rest of the men should remain in the saloon while the cabins were being searched. Then, if nothing came to light, a new line of action was to be entered upon. Only Tim Fleeters accompanied the searchers. He would be necessary, it was considered, to recognize the poke.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Mickie O'Toole, as they entered the first house, and lighted a candle. "This place makes me crape, it's so still and death-loike."

Every nook was examined; the small box, the blankets, while even the stove, from which the fire had died out, was not overlooked. One by one the cabins were entered, and the same monotonous work continued. Some of these Keith had never entered before, and their bareness appalled him. What was there, he wondered, in this golden lure, which could induce men to abandon every comfort, and undergo such hardships in that desolate land? Was the uncertain game worth it all? He could not believe it.

At length the last house was searched, the one which stood by the trail leading to the Indian village. Nothing, so far, had been discovered, and the men peered at one another through the darkness.

"Well," said Perdue, "we've had all this work for nothing, and I'm sick of the job."

"But we're not through yet," replied Pritchen sharply. "There are several more to visit, your own, the Radhurst cabin, and the mission house, to say nothing of the Indian shacks."

"But ye wouldn't bother the old man and his daughter this time of the night, surely," responded the saloonkeeper.

"I'd as soon distarb me mither's grave," said Mickie, "as to frighten the swate-faced lady up yon by our presence to-night."

"Umph! I guess she won't mind," sneered Pritchen, "especially if the parson's along."

The blood rushed into Keith's face, as he listened to these remarks. It was hard for him to stand quietly there and hear these men speak so lightly of one whose image was enshrined in his heart, and who was becoming dearer to him every day. Her pure face and large, wondering eyes rose before him, and when Pritchen uttered his coarse sneer he turned suddenly upon him.

"What do you mean by those words?" he demanded.

"Anything you like," returned Pritchen.

"That's not an answer to my question. You named me in connection with Miss Radhurst, and I want you to explain."

"You seem mighty interested."

"Yes, I am. And wouldn't any man with the slightest spark of chivalry be interested if he heard insinuations about one, especially a woman, who is as innocent and pure as the flower of the field? Refer to her again as you did lately, and you'll see how interested I am."

The tone in Keith's voice warned Pritchen and the rest that the less said about the matter the better, so an awkward pause ensued. Perdue was the first to speak.

"Let's search the mission house now," he suggested, "and leave the Radhurst cabin till the last."

This plan was at once agreed upon, and, in no agreeable frame of mind, Keith followed his companions up the narrow trail leading to the house.

How often he had traversed that very path during the long years of regular duty. Time and again had he looked up at the Indian village on the brow of the hill above him, and a spirit of joy always thrilled his being. The children who used to run to meet him were ever sure of a hearty greeting. How dear they had become to him—the lambs of his flock. Upon every one he had sprinkled the few drops of water, and sealed them with the sign of the cross in Holy Baptism. His flock he knew all by name, from the youngest to the oldest, and he was their spiritual father.

But on this night no such feelings possessed his soul. A heavy weight oppressed him in some mysterious manner. He tried to shake it off, but in vain. The gliding figures before him assumed the appearance of evil spirits luring him on to a doom over which he had no control. Why had Pritchen chosen him as one of the committee unless he had some hidden motive in view? Had a trap been laid by this wily serpent in which to entangle him? He was not superstitious; yet as they drew near the cabin a chill passed through his body. A feeble light was shining through the window, from the candle which was struggling bravely in the last throes of life.

They opened the door and entered. The room was cold, for the fire had gone out. As in the other cabins, they at once set to work and the place was thoroughly searched. Several tried the lid of the chest, but, finding it locked, desisted. At length Pritchen drew near, and seized the cover with both hands.

"Hello! this is locked!" he exclaimed. "Let's have the key."

Keith had thought of the chest, and the picture lying within. As Pritchen turned to him his face flushed in a confused manner, which Perdue, who was watching, observed.

"The key, I say!" repeated Pritchen in a sharp voice. "Let's have the key to this chest.

"It must be in the lock," replied Keith. "I left it there when I went out, and did not turn it, either."

"Look for yourself, then," and Pritchen stepped back to make room for the missionary.

Keith stooped down and examined it carefully. He tried the lid, but it was fastened. He placed his hand to his forehead and tried to think.

"Maybe you locked it and put the key in your pocket," suggested one.

Keith ran his hands through every pocket, and into each corner, but all in vain; the key was nowhere to be found.

"Very strange," muttered Pritchen. "A chest in the cabin, a strong one at that—locked, and the

owner unable to find the key! What do you keep in such a precious box?"

Keith heard him, but heeded not. He was trying to think. Yes, he had placed the picture there before he left the building, and closed the lid down without turning the key. He was sure of that.

He was aroused from his reverie by Pritchen asking for an axe.

"There," and Keith pointed to a corner of the room.

At first an attempt was made to pry up the cover, by forcing the axe under the edge, but in this they failed.

"Let's smash the d—— thing!" cried Pritchen. "We can't waste the whole night here, and we must see into this box."

Suiting the action to the word, he drove the blade into the smooth lid, and in a short time the cover was in splinters.

In silence Keith beheld the work of destruction. What could he do? Every blow seemed to strike at his own heart, telling him of impending trouble.

"Hello! what's this? A woman's face! Well, I'll be damned! Look, boys," and Pritchen pointed to the sketch lying in full view.

The weak candle light fell tremblingly upon the fair face as Perdue bent over the box to examine the picture more closely. Then he seized it roughly in his hand, and held it up for a better inspection.

It was not the little laugh given by one of the men which stirred Keith so intensely, but the wink he caught Pritchen tipping to Perdue. It was that quick telegraphic message, the base innuendo which stung and lashed him more than a thousand words. The hot blood, recoiling at the silent insult, surged back to the body's secret depths, leaving the face as white as drifted snow. Keith's eyes flashed danger as he reached out one long tense arm.

"Give that to me," he demanded, restraining himself with a great effort. "It has nothing to do with your business here."

"It's interesting, though," replied Perdue.

"Innocent and pure as the flower of the field," sneered Pritchen, quoting the missionary's own words.

Scarcely had he ceased when Keith, throwing discretion to the wind, leaped upon him, and with one blow sent him reeling back over a small bench standing near. Regaining his feet as quickly as possible, with a terrible oath, Pritchen rushed for his antagonist, only to go down again before that clinched sledge-hammer fist. This time he did not attempt to rise, but lay on the floor, giving vent to the most blood-curdling oaths. Keith towered above him, awaiting his further movement.

"Lie there, then, you serpent!" he cried, spurning him with his foot. "It's your natural position, anyway."

An exclamation of surprise from Perdue caused him to glance quickly around, and the sight which met his gaze was one never to be forgotten. Over the chest stood the saloonkeeper, holding in his hand a well-filled moose-skin poke, which he had just lifted from the bottom of the box.

"Is that yours, Tim?" he asked.

"Yes," came the reply. "Don't you see my initials, 'T. F.' worked in the poke? I did it myself, and could swear to it anywhere."

"And what's this?" exclaimed Mickie O'Toole, holding up another poke, which was empty. "See, and here are letters, too, 'K. R.', so, Tim, you're not the only one who's been pinched."

"Maybe the parson kin throw some light on the subject," and Perdue turned towards the missionary with a malicious light in his eye.

But Keith did not answer. He stood as if rooted to the floor. What did it all mean? Was he dreaming? He placed his hand to his forehead. No, no, it was no dream, but a terrible reality. A base, cowardly trick had been imposed upon him; he felt sure of that."

"God help me!" he inwardly groaned. "What am I to do?"

"No wonder the box was locked and the key gone," he heard some one say, but it moved him not. His thoughts were elsewhere. What would she think? What would his flock think? Their pastor a base

thief! It was terrible. Why had such a cross been laid upon him? What had he done to deserve it all? He thought of another, of One, sinless and pure, who had borne His cross alone; who had been mocked, laughed at, and spit upon. He would not desert him now, anyway, in his time of trial.

The idea comforted him somewhat. A new feeling took possession of him, a strength which he had seldom experienced before. He felt a Presence very near, some unseen influence giving him a marvellous calmness and courage. He looked at the men, and listened to their cruel words unmoved. He saw Pritchen standing by, with Satanic delight stamped upon his features, but it affected him not.

Base and sordid though they were, his companions could not fail to recognize the dignified, lofty bearing of the man before them, and the new light which illumined his face. Mickie O'Toole paused in the midst of a jocular remark, reverently crossed himself, and forgot to finish his sentence. Perdue remained silent, and even Pritchen failed to pour forth his quota of filth and blasphemy. They all felt, though none would have acknowledged it, that some mysterious power was in that room, before which their guilty souls shrank and feared. Keith, alone, knew that One who said, "Lo, I am with you alway," had not deserted him in the hour of distress.

It was only after they had left the house and moved down the hill through the gloomy night that

the miners recovered from their temporary fear. When at length they thrust Keith into the saloon among the astonished waiting men, the vilest words in the English language were none too strong with which to introduce the wretched man.

CHAPTER XVIII

YUKON JENNIE

ON the afternoon preceding the miners' meeting, Yukon Jennie sat silently in the corner of the old chief's lodge. Her busy little fingers were arranging a number of small pictures, choosing out the best and laying them carefully by themselves. Her face was full of animation as she bent over her task, and her eyes sparkled with delight as she gazed tenderly upor some favourite sketch.

"The pale-face woman will like that," she said to herself. "When she sees the little stream running through the woods, playing with the sunbeams, laughing at the trees, kissing the flowers, and singing, singing all the time, she will be glad.

Since the night she had fled from the church, clutching the keen knife in her hand, a transformation had come over this dusky, wayward maiden. As long as her terrible resolve was pent up in her little heart it possessed her whole being. But when she had given vent to feelings in passionate words,

the outcome was marvellous. It had proven a veritable safety-valve to her surcharged soul, a relief, which in others of a different disposition would have been effected by scalding tears.

To acknowledge any change to her faithful teacher was foreign to her proud nature. When once again, however, in the cold night air she looked for a time towards the dimly lighted saloon, and then made her way slowly to the Indian lodge which was her temporary home. The sight of the sad look on the missionary's face stood out clear and distinct as she lay that night beneath her blankets. Another Face, too, often came before her, weary, and blood-stained from the cruel crown of thorns.

No picture had affected her so much as the one she had often gazed upon, in the school room, of the Saviour hanging on the cross. Over and over again she had sketched it until every detail was indelibly impressed upon her heart. The weary face; the nail-pierced hands and feet; the mocking crowd, had mingled with her dreams, and her passionate resolve, but never until this night had the meaning of it all stood out so real and distinct.

During the days that followed Jennie fought a stern battle. At times the old longing almost gained the mastery, and she would draw forth the knife, but always to return it to its hiding place among the bundle of rags. Sometimes she watched Pritchen's movements with a strange fascination, when the

wild nature would reassert itself until crushed back again by a mighty effort.

The result of this stern struggle was very apparent on this bright afternoon as the maiden busied herself with the sketches. Her face, almost radiant, revealed the heart within, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

When the pictures had been arranged to her satisfaction, she arose and began to array herself in her finest dress, kept only for the most important occasions. It took her some time to complete her costume, and often she glanced at herself in a small broken mirror, with all the pride of some society belle preparing for a grand ball. Finally over her head and shoulders she threw a small bright-coloured shawl, a present from the Christmas tree two years before.

Seizing the pictures in her hand, and drawing the wrap firmly around her body, she left the lodge, glided swiftly and noiselessly down the trail leading to the white settlement, and after a while turned sharply to the left. A queer little bundle she presented as she mounted the hill leading to the Radhurst cabin. Timidly she knocked upon the door, and when Constance had thrown it open, she stepped into the building without a word and seated herself upon the edge of the first stool which caught her attention. Her little black eyes instinctively drank in every object in the room, from the pictures on the

wall to the white-haired man sitting by the window with a book in his hand.

But Constance formed the chief attraction. White men were no novelty to her, but a pale-face woman was something new, and worth studying. She had seen her every Sunday at the church, sitting at the little harmonium, and had been held spellbound by her sweet rich voice joining in the singing. She associated Constance with that strange world, the glorious dreamland, which filled so much of her life, and of which the bell was an important factor. From her seat in the back of the church she would look at her own hands, and notice how dark they were, compared with the organist's fair white ones. Returning to the lodge she would gaze long and earnestly into the broken mirror, and wonder why her face was not like the white woman's. Much time did she spend in her efforts to arrange her hair in the same fluffy way with wavy tresses crowning cheek and brow like the object of her admiration. But, poor child, the more she tried the less she succeeded, for her straight black hair proved too intractable, and refused any other method than the long braid, or its wild abandoned condition.

For a time Constance continued the sewing upon which she was engaged, and addressed no word to the maiden. She had often heard of this Indian characteristic of silence when first entering a building, and wished to prove it for herself. But when at

length Jennie drew forth her treasure from beneath her shawl, and uttered the broken word "peejee," Constance looked up.

"What is it?" she asked kindly, going over to where the girl was sitting.

"Peejee. See, nice peejee," and Jennie held out her hand.

"Oh, pictures," laughed Constance, taking the sketches from the maiden. "Did you bring them for me?"

"Me fetch 'm. Heem tell Jennie come."

"Who told you?"

"Gikhyi."

"What, Mr. Steadman?"

"Ah, ah."

"Look, father," and Constance crossed the room to where Mr. Radhurst was sitting, a silent witness of it all. "Mr. Steadman sent Jennie here to show us her pictures; how kind of him."

Jennie went softly across the room, and laid her hand upon the sketches.

"Calling us to order, are you, Jennie?" Constance laughed. "Come, then, show us your pictures, and tell us about them."

Eagerly the girl seized the sketch in her fingers.

"Peety," she said, holding it tenderly up before them. "F'owers, twees, water."

Constance and her father were much surprised as they examined them one by one. They were crude,

of course, from an artistic point of view, but they exhibited genius in no slight degree. Trees, houses, dogs and people were all there. Presently Constance caught sight of a face which made her start. She seized it from Jennie almost rudely.

"Child!" she cried. "Who is this? Where did you see that man?"

Somewhat alarmed, Jennie shrank back without uttering a word.

"Connie, what's the matter," questioned Mr. Radhurst, astonished at his daughter's excitement.

"Look, father," and Constance handed him the sketch. "This is Kenneth's picture, there can be no mistake. The girl must have seen him somewhere, perhaps on the trail."

"There *is* a striking resemblance," returned her father. "But we cannot be sure that it's Kenneth's."

"No, no, father, I can't believe it's any other. It's so real. Where did you see this man?" she demanded, turning to Jennie.

"Me no see'm," replied the maiden.

"What, never saw him; never met him on the trail?"

Jennie shook her head. "Me no savvy. Me no see'm."

"Look, Jennie," said Mr. Radhurst kindly, "How you make this picture? You see something, eh?"

Her face brightened at this, and she hastened to reply.

"Beeg chief savvy."

"What, the big chief knows?"

"Ah, ah. All same peejee."

"What, a picture like this?"

"Ah, ah. All same peejee."

Father and daughter looked at each other, and the same idea flashed into their minds.

"We need help," began Constance. "The old chief knows something which might be important."

"Mr. Steadman will help us," replied her father. "He knows the language, and has the chief's confidence."

"I shall go to him at once," and Constance reached for her cloak.

"Why not send a note by the Indian girl, and ask him to come here, Connie? It's quite dark outside, and I don't like for you to go alone. There are too many rough men around, and, besides, I would like to talk with Mr. Steadman, too, about the matter."

"Very well, father; what you say is quite true."

Sitting down before the table, Constance drew forth a sheet of note paper from her little writing pad, and with a lead pencil wrote a few words to the clergyman. This was the first time she had ever written to him, and her face flushed as she began, "Dear Mr. Steadman."

"I have asked him to come here as soon as possible," she said to her father, as she folded the paper and placed it into an envelope.

"That will do, Connie. He will know that we need him on urgent business."

"Jennie," said Constance, "will you take this to the mission house, to Mr. Steadman?"

The maiden clutched the letter in her hand, rose, and started for the door. She felt it was something important.

"And you will go quick?"

"Jennie go quick," was the response; " all same wind," and with that she passed out of the room.

When once outside, Jennie paused and looked across to the Indian village. There was a short cut, which would save her the longer way around. This she took, and soon drew near the mission house. By this trail she approached the building on the left side, through a small clump of trees.

She was in the act of stepping into full view, when the sight of a man approaching the cabin arrested her steps, and caused her to shrink back a few paces. Not long was she left in doubt, for her keen eyes detected the slinking form of Pritchen. That he was there on mischief bent, she had no doubt, and she determined to watch his actions. Leaving the trail, she skirted the edges of the bunch of trees, keeping well within their shadows for some distance. Then she crossed an open space, and stepped behind the

very building where Pritchen had been concealed. From this position she saw the wretch peering through the window, and then enter the house.

With the speed of a deer, she hurried up the path, and, taking her stand at the corner of the building, watched the door almost breathlessly lest Pritchen should reappear. Satisfying herself that she was secure, and could run to the back of the house, or take shelter among the trees, she plucked up courage. Then she crept to the window and looked in. At first she drew suddenly back, fearing she would be seen. Finding, however, that the man did not look her way, she at length maintained her ground.

It was easy to see everything quite plainly, from the placing of the pokes into the chest, to the throwing of the key into the stove, and the destruction of the picture. What it all meant, she could not tell, and she wondered what had become of the missionary. When, however, Pritchen had finished his cowardly work, and passed out into the night, Jennie was nowhere to be seen. She had disappeared, bearing with her the secret of the deed of darkness.

CHAPTER XIX

CARIBOU SOL

ANOTHER night had shut down over the great Yukon valley, a night of wind and storm. It had been snowing since morning on this, the most memorable day in the history of Klassan.

Caribou Sol stood in front of his cabin, looking out into the darkness. He did not mind the driving wind, laden with snow, which beat against him; in fact, he never noticed it. His face was marked with anguish as he closed the door and moved slowly along the trail leading to the Radhurst cabin. Up the hill he crept like a worn-out, weary man. He breasted the tempest with his head bent forward, while his long white beard was tossed across his breast like seaweed flung upon some surf-beaten rock.

Constance was sitting by the table with a look of expectancy upon her face when Sol knocked at the door. Much had she changed since the previous evening. Her old lightness of spirit was gone, and a sadness weighed upon her soul. Tears glistened

in her eyes, and the rosy colour had fled her cheeks, leaving them very white.

Joe Simkins had brought the news early that morning, and all day long the suspense had been terrible. Not for an instant did she or her father believe that Keith was guilty. There was something wrong, they felt sure of that. Constance longed to go to him, that he might know that they had not deserted him at any rate, and at times she was tempted to go to the trial, face the men, and give him a word of encouragement.

She fancied him defending himself against the base charge with all the determination of his manly nature. That he would fight hard, she had no doubt, but she shuddered when she thought how little one man could do against so many. She was surprised, too, to find what an interest she took in his welfare, and how his trouble pierced her heart like a sharp sword.

As the evening wore on, and the storm howled and raged outside, and no one came near the cabin, the suspense became almost unbearable. Had the worst happened, so that even Joe did not dare to come and break the news? She had often heard how gold thieves were treated by enraged miners, and she shivered as the idea came to her this night. Mechanically, she picked up a book, a small copy of Keble's "Christian Year," which Keith had left there. Opening it at random, her eyes rested upon a verse for

the twenty-third Sunday after Trinity, which attracted her attention. Slowly she read:

"But first by many a stern and fiery blast
The world's rude furnace must our blood refine,
And many a blow of keenest woe be passed,
Till every pulse beat true to airs divine."

The book dropped upon her lap, and for some time she remained in silent thought. "Perhaps that is meant for me," she meditated. "I have been careless and indifferent to the higher things of life, living only for to-day. Is the Great Master allowing these things to happen, the loss of mother, brother, home, and now——"

She was startled by a knock upon the door, and she trembled as she laid the book upon the table and crossed the room.

Caribou Sol grasped her hand in his own strong one, and looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Bad storm," he panted, "an' a tough climb up yon hill. I ain't as young as I uster be."

Then Constance noticed how haggard was his face, while his hair and beard seemed whiter than when first she saw him. A feeling of dread entered her heart.

"Tell me, oh, tell me!" she cried, "what has happened!"

"Ye've heard somethin', then, miss?" questioned the old man.

"Yes, Joe Simkins was here this morning and told us what took place last night. But we have heard nothing about the trial."

Sol sat down upon a bench near where Mr. Radhurst was lying, and placed his head in his hands.

"My God!" he groaned, "it was awful!"

"What's awful?" demanded Constance. "Tell us quick!"

"They've fired 'im!"

"What?"

"Fired the parson! Druve 'im from Klassan!"

"The brutes! The wretches!" and Constance stamped her small foot upon the floor, while her hands clinched and her eyes glowed. "Are they men or only beasts? Did no one stand up for him?"

"Only me an' Joe," replied the miner, looking with admiration upon the spirited woman before him. "We done what we could. But they're divils, miss, is them miners, when they're roused."

"Did he fight hard?"

"Fight? You should have seed 'im. I never seen anything like it. He was a match fer 'em all, but it was no use. They got turned agin 'im, an' 'ud listen to nothin'."

"What did he have to say about the gold being found in his cabin?" asked Mr. Radhurst.

"He couldn't explain, sir. Nor could you nor me, if we'd had sich a cowardly trick played upon us. He jist stated the matter in words that rung with truth, any ninny could see that. But every wan on that committee got so excited that they jist threw questions at 'im."

" 'Whar is the key,' says Pritchen.

" 'Why did ye git so scart when we axed ye to open the chist?' speaks up Perdue. An' afore he could answer, some one else slung another at 'im. It wasn't a trial, miss, it was jist a bunch of sarpents hissin' all the time."

"And did Mr. Steadman seem frightened when they wanted to open the chest?" queried Constance, in surprise.

"I heerd so."

"But why?"

"On account of the picter."

"The picture?"

"Yes. Tim Slater, he was thar, ye know, says 'twas an uncommon fine 'un, lyin' right atop the chist."

"But why should the picture frighten him?"

"He wasn't altogether frightened, miss. Ye can't frighten 'im. He only got a little white around the gills, so Tim says. Ye see, 'twas a woman's picter, all fixed up on that kind of paper them artist chaps use, an' done with a pencil. 'Twas mighty fine, so Tim says, an' I guess he knows."

Constance made no reply to these words. "A picture!" she mused, "and a woman's!" Anxious though she was to hear more about the trial, her thoughts wandered. She longed with womanly curiosity to know about that picture. Was it a young face, pretty, and whether the missionary had explained whose it was? Something, however, restrained her. She did not dare to ask, lest she should betray the note of eagerness in her voice, and she was sure her face would flush even if she mentioned it.

"But it wasn't the only charge they brung agin the parson," continued Sol. "They raked up all sorts of stuff. It was certainly wonnerful."

"What else did they say?" questioned Mr. Radhurst.

"They said, or at least Pritchen did, that he killed an Injun woman some years back."

"What!"

"Yes, that's what he said. But, my, you should have seed the parson then. He was jist like a tager, an' I never heerd a man say sich cuttin' things in all my life. He jist went fer Pritchen an' opened up a page in his history which 'ud make ye creep. He told sartin an' clear that the villain himself was the one who killed the woman. An', says he:

" 'Thar's a gal in this town who was thar as a wee child. She seed it all. She seen her mother killed afore her very eyes. Bring her here,' says he, 'an' she'll tell yez what a liar this man is.' "

"And what did they do?" asked Constance almost breathlessly.

"Jist laughed at 'im."

"The brutes!"

" 'Bring her!' he cries; 'she's in Klassan. If yez are men, ye'll do what's fair. Her name is Yukon Jennie, an' she'll tell yez all."

"This appeal kinder touched some of 'em, an' they axed fer the gal, though I saw that Pritchen was mighty oneasy. So we waited till the gal was fetched."

"Did she come?" and Constance leaned eagerly forward, as the old man paused.

"No, miss. They couldn't find hair nor hide of her. She'd skipped out."

"Oh!"

"Yes, cut an' run. Ye should have seed the look on the parson's face when he heerd that; it was terrible. An' ye could have heered the men hoot an' laugh clean up here, if ye'd been listenin'."

"But where did she go?" asked Mr. Radhurst. "The girl was here until quite late yesterday afternoon."

"That's what the men couldn't find out. The old chief was mighty surly, too, an' wouldn't tell nothin'. But thar was one thing I did notice," he continued. "While the rest was hootin' an' shoutin', a scart look come over Pritchen's face when he heered that the girl had skipped, an' that the chief was cranky.

He seemed feered of somethin', an' I can't make out jist what it is."

"Were those the only charges, Mr. Burke?" questioned Constance, anxious to hear more.

"No, thar's another I'm comin' to now, an' a mighty nasty one, at that."

Constance's face became still paler, and her lips quivered as she heard these ominous words. Was there no end to these terrible things?"

"They say that the other poke found in the chist has a mighty suspicious look about it."

"In what way?"

"Waal, ye see, thar was two letters on the poke, which seemed to pint to somethin' bad. Pritchen was out huntin' mountain sheep a short time ago, so he says, in the Ibex Valley. While thar he stayed in an old log shanty, an' the place was all upsot lookin', so he says, as if a terrible fight had taken place. Then he finds a book layin' on the floor with the parson's name inside."

"What book was it?" asked Constance eagerly.

"I'm not sure that I kin remember the full name," and the old man scratched his head in a puzzled manner. "But it's a book of poetry written by a chap by the name of Brown or Black, I jist can't tell which. I never heered of 'im afore, 'ave you?"

But Constance did not reply. She was thinking of what Keith had told her about his copy of Browning. He had lost it somewhere on the trail, but he had

told her nothing about the cabin. What did it all mean?

"But that wasn't all, miss. Thinkin' somethin' was wrong, Pritchen hunted around fer a time, an' found whar a man had been buried, but the wolves hadn't left much, only torn clothes. The chap had been put into the snow, while a cross an' two letters had been cut in the rock above. The suspicious thing is, that them letters an' the ones on the poke found in the chist are jist the same."

"Very strange," remarked Mr. Radhurst. "Do you remember the letters?"

"Yes, there were jist two, 'K. R.'"

At these words, Constance started and rose to her feet. Trembling violently, she approached the miner. Once she put out her hand as if for support.

"Tell me," she said in a hoarse whisper, "if you know anything more?"

Sol looked at her in amazement.

"I didn't know ye'd feel so bad, or I'd not told ye," he replied, mistaking the cause of her agitation. "But thar isn't much more to be said. The parson told in plain words how he'd found a sick man in the Ibex cabin, an' cared fer 'im as well as he could. When he died he buried 'im in the snow, an' put them marks on the rock, but about the poke, he had never seed it afore."

"Did he tell the man's name?" asked Constance.

"No."

"No! And why not?"

"He wouldn't tell, an' that was the hardest thing agin him. Then some one axed 'im why he didn't report the matter when he reached Klassan, an' at that the parson lit out:

" 'Tell,' says he. 'What chance had I to tell with all yez agin me, ruinin' my Injun flock, an' playin' that mean trick upon me in sendin' me to Siwash Crik? De yez think I'd care to tell ye?' "

"What trick?" asked Mr. Radhurst.

"What! ye never heered?"

"No, not a word."

"No? Waal, now, that's queer. It's been the talk of the camp ever since. They made out that Jim Blasco, that divil out yon, was wounded, an' a doctor was wanted mighty bad. So they got the parson to go, an' sich a laughin' an' shoutin' they made over it all at his expense. I didn't think so much about it then, but now it jist fairly makes me bile."

"Why, Mr. Steadman never said a word to us about it when he came to Siwash Creek," said Constance in surprise.

"Ay, is that so, miss? Waal, it's jist like 'im. Some 'ud have blabbed the whole thing, an' made a big story outer it. But not 'im. He's too much of a man fer that. He doesn't tell everything he knows, an' I reckon he has some good reason fer not tellin' that chap's name that died out in the Ibex cabin."

Constance arose, and, going to her own little curtained apartment, brought forth a small picture.

"Mr. Burke," she said, "you have met quite a number of men in this district, did you ever see any one who looked like that?"

Sol took the picture in his hand and gazed upon it for a time. Then he held it up close to the light for a better inspection.

"Fine chap, that, miss. Is he a relation of yourn?"

"It's my brother, Kenneth, and his initials are just the same as the ones on the rock and the poke."

"Ye don't say so, waal! But, miss, fer God's sake, what's the matter?" and the old man dropped the picture and stared at the young woman.

And good reason was there for his surprise, for upon Constance's face was stamped a look of horror, and her eyes were fastened upon the small window near at hand.

"A face! A face! I saw it there!" she gasped, "looking into the room. Oh, it was awful!" and she dropped upon a bench out of sheer weakness.

An ugly look came into Sol's face, as he rose to his feet, while his hand instinctively sought his hip pocket, and rested upon the butt of a revolver concealed there.

"We're watched," he whispered. "Them divils are wild to-night. Some are havin' a drunken spree, an' it's hard to tell what they'll do afore mornin'. My

old carcase ain't wuth much, but some of them'll be wuth less if they come meddlin' around here. I guess, though, we'd better draw that curtain, an' shet out all pryin' eyes. Thar, that's better. Now don't be frightened, miss. Nothin'll harm ye as long as this old gun holds true, an' she ain't failed me yit, though she's seen some hightly ugly times."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Radhurst, who had remained still through the excitement. "You are very good, but I don't think any harm will come to us. Perhaps some one was passing and happened to glance in at the window. Sit down, please, and tell us some more about the trial, for I am anxious to hear all."

"It may be as ye say, sir. I only hope so," and Sol resumed his seat.

"Thar ain't much more to tell about that fuss. I saw at once when the trial began that it was all up with the parson, an' that they intended to condemn him, but I didn't think it'd take so long. They jist played with 'im like a cat plays with a mouse. But at last it was ended, an' Pritchen, who was chairman, stood up, an', said he:

" 'We give ye yer chice; hit the trail in two hours, or stay here an' take yer dose from us.'

"I kin see the parson standin' thar now with a wonnerful look on his face. He didn't seem to hear the chairman's word, fer he was gazin' through the

dirty winder, out inter the storm, an' away to the Injun village beyond.

" 'De ye hear me, damn ye!' cried Pritchen, bringin' his fist down upon the table with a bang. 'Why don't ye answer? We can't fool here all day.'

"Then the parson turned and looked square into his eyes. He was very calm, an' he spoke so quiet an' solemn like:

" 'Man,' says he, 'd'ye mean it? Fer Nellie's sake, an' the kids, won't ye have marcy. Ye know I didn't do them deeds, an' ye know, Bill Pritchen,' says he, movin' up close to the chairman, 'that ye yerself are the one that left that young chap out thar to die. Ye was his pardner. Ye stole his gold, that's what ye did.'

"The parson could go no further, fer the men set up sich a shoutin' an' a laughin' that ye couldn't hear yerself speak.

"Then he gave them a look I'll never fergit, full of scorn and pity. I never thought a man could look that way. He straightened himself up, an' turned to the chairman.

" 'I'll go,' says he, 'I'll hit the trail. I'll leave ye. But remember, I'll come back when I git ready.'

" 'Come back, if ye dare,' says Pritchen, an' the men hooted as the poor chap walked from the buildin' as proud as a lord.

"I follered 'im to his cabin, fer I was sore hit, an' stood with 'im as he was ready to leave. He had

his rifle, snow-shoes, his medical case, an' a small pack of grub on his back. He wouldn't say much, not even whar he was goin'. He seemed like a man in a dream.

" 'Sol,' says he, jist afore he started, 'I'm as innocent of them charges as the new-born babe."

" 'I know it,' says I, 'but what kin we do?'

" 'Nothin',' says he. 'Nothin' now, but the Good Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness in His own way, never ye fear that, Sol.'

"Then he looked across to this cabin, an' remained very still fer a time.

" 'Won't ye say good-bye?' says I.

" 'I can't,' says he, with a groan. 'With this shadder over me, I can't face her; it's better not. But ye'll look after'm, Sol,' an' he lays his hand upon my shoulder.

" 'Till death,' says I.

" 'God bless ye, man,' says he, an' with that he was gone—gone out inter the night through the wild howlin' tempest."

For some time the three sat in silence, each wrapped in earnest thought. As Constance listened to the snow-laden wind beating against the window, she pictured Keith battling his way through the dreary night, or else crouching by a lonely camp fire. Her ideas of Christianity were undergoing a marked change. Formerly she had associated religion with large churches, where well-dressed people

attended, and the services were conducted by white-robed clergymen, assisted by high-class music and well-trained choirs. She knew that the clergy, for the most part, were a devoted, hard-working class, but the thought of connecting them with the heroic in life had never entered her head.

Once she had attended a Synod service, where the clergy marched in, two by two, singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Though she had been told that some of them were men broken down by strenuous toil in frontier work among the Indians and miners, she had experienced no thrill or quickening of the heart. Her heroes were of a different class: soldiers, who fought and died for their country, or sailors, who braved the perils of the great deep. Of these she loved to read, while a missionary book, or a magazine telling of the noble deeds done, and lives given for the cause of Christ, was something not to be considered.

But her eyes had been opened, and she saw a man, a student of no mean order, who had given up his life to uplift a band of uncouth Indians in a lonely region, away from all the refinements of civilization, who knew nothing of ease or of popular applause. And the most wonderful of all was that he did not consider it a sacrifice, but simply a joy to be able to serve. Then to see this man, in his noble efforts to assist and cheer the miners, opposed, scoffed at, and

driven out, perhaps to die, by the very ones he had tried to help, was strange to contemplate. She had heard people laugh at missionaries and their efforts to benefit the natives. Now a longing entered her heart to go to those very people, and tell them what she had seen of the efforts of one man.

The report of a rifle startled her from her reverie. Then the sound of voices came faintly through the night.

Sol sprang to his feet, and rushed to the door.

"Stay here!" he cried. "I'll be back in a minute."

Presently he returned with a pained expression upon his face.

"I was afeered of it," he replied, in answer to Constance's inquiring look. "Them varmints are burnin' the mission house. Blow out the candle, an' come to the winder to see fer yerselves."

With the room in darkness, and the curtain drawn back, the three stood and watched the scene of destruction. The flames, fanned by the wind, were sending up huge forked tongues into the night, while anon a rifle shot or a shout would wing its way across the snow.

"God help us!" groaned Sol. "What will they do next? They don't realize what they're doin' tonight. They must be mad or they wouldn't burn the mission house, whar the Injuns keep their supplies.

What will the natives do when they return? God help us then!"

"Amen," fervently responded Mr. Radhurst, as he returned wearily to his position on the couch.

CHAPTER XX

THE OLD CHIEF'S MESSENGER

THE morning of the trial Yukon Jennie stood in the chief's lodge, girded for a long journey. She was clad in a soft buckskin suit, the skirt of which reached but a short distance below her knees. Her leggings were of a bright scarlet material, and her feet encased in a pair of moccasins of her own handiwork. On her head was a hood of gray, so capacious that only a small portion of her face was exposed to view. Around her waist was a leathern belt, pendant from which were a small hatchet, a sheath knife, and a drinking cup. Altogether, she presented a picturesque figure, standing there awaiting the old man's pleasure.

On her face was a look of determination, mingled with a high resolve, for was she not about to undertake a task of supreme importance, fraught with hardships and dangers, for the sake of her tribe? She was only a girl—a waif—and in the eyes of the great hunters counted for little. They fed, housed,

and clothed her, but never considered her as of any real importance.

After leaving the mission house the night before, she had searched for Keith in order to deliver Constance's message. Failing in this, she had gone to the saloon, hoping to find him there. Hearing the talking within, she feared to enter, and waited for some time outside in the bleak darkness. At length wearying of this, she returned to the chief's lodge, and sat quietly in one corner, apparently lost in thought. After a while she again sallied forth, and had advanced but a short distance when the Vigilance Committee hurried from the mission house and started down the hill. Keeping at a safe distance, she followed them to the saloon, heard the rough, angry words, and saw violent hands laid upon Keith. She paused only for an instant, and then with the speed of a deer, sped back to the lodge and told the chief what she had witnessed. No comment was made as Jennie related her story, but all through the night the aged man sat and brooded in deep silence. Early in the morning he aroused the maiden, and in a few brief words ordered her to prepare for a long journey.

"You must go," he said in the native tongue, "swift as the wind, straight as the wild goose, and carry this to Amos."

As he spoke he took from his neck four strings of

beads fastened securely together, and handed them to the maiden.

"Guard them well," he commanded, "and come back soon."

Jennie's eyes sparkled with delight as she seized the necklace in her hand. Never before had she seen the old man part with his treasure. It was the symbol of his office as chief of his tribe, and well did Jennie know the meaning when it was entrusted to any one else. She had heard of it being done once before. Long years ago, so it was said around the camp fire, had the chief sent the beads by a trusty courier over leagues and leagues of mountain, forest and plain to summon the natives to hurl back a marauding band of Indians.

With the beads about her neck, and a small blanket and some food on her back, Jennie bade the chief good-bye, and sped away from the lodge out upon the long trail. All day long she fought her way through the blinding storm with the unerring instinct of a wild animal. The region was familiar to her, though every trace of a path had been obliterated. No living thing met her gaze, as hour after hour she plodded on. When night shut down she sought shelter in a thicket of fir trees, lighted a fire, ate her scanty meal, and, wrapping her small blanket around her body, was soon fast asleep.

Towards morning the wind dropped to rest, the

snow ceased falling, and the bright moon smiled forth from banks of drifting clouds. A shy rabbit, hopping around in search of a meal from some tender cotton-wood bark, started back at the sight of the curious bundle lying in the snow; while some distance off a black fox sniffed the air and turned warily away.

Early in the morning Jennie was up and on again. On the fourth day, footsore and weary, she dragged her tired body towards the nearest camp. The sun had gone down and darkness had spread over the land. There were only a few Indians here, the rest having gone farther afield. It was the hour of prayer, and, according to their usual custom, they were all gathered into the largest camp.

It was a quaint structure, this rude abode, which served as the little sanctuary in the wild. It had the appearance of a log house cut in two, and pulled apart, leaving a clear passage of about four feet right through the building. In this space a glowing fire of large logs was sending out its generous heat, while the smoke ascended through the opening above. On either side of the fire the Indians were gathered, reclining on blankets, wolf and bear skins, placed over a liberal supply of fir boughs.

Amos, the catechist, was reading the lesson for the day when Jennie glided into the lodge. His noble face was full of earnestness as he rolled forth the long words in the rythmical Takudh language, paus-

ing occasionally to explain some passage to the intent listeners.

Though all present had noticed Jennie's entrance, no sign of recognition was made as she quietly settled down in their midst, and listened to the reader. With impassive faces, and a stoicism worthy of the ancient Grecians, they bowed their heads while Amos repeated several of the prayers of the Church, and then led in the singing of "Nearer, My God, to Thee," one of their favourite hymns. Intensely fond of music, their voices rang out sweet and clear upon the night air. Old and young joined in the hymn, a translation made years before by that prince of pioneer missionaries, the venerable Archdeacon McDonald, who did such a great work at Fort Yukon in the early sixties.

"Ndo nyet nyakkwun Ttia
Ndo nyet nyakkwun,
Kwizyik nititae,
Guselshit chi.
Tthui sih chilig telya
Ndo nyet nyakkwun Ttia,
Ndo nyet nyakkwun."*

*Literal translation:

"Close to Thee, my Father,
Close to Thee.
Even the cross
Raiseth me if
Still my song shall be
Close to Thee, my Father,
Close to Thee."

Not until the hymn had been sung, and the beautiful "Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ" said, did the Indians turn their attention to Jennie. Then all reserve was thrown off, and they surrounded her, plying question after question as to the cause of her visit. To none of these, however, did the maiden reply, but unfastening the buckskin jacket, she drew forth the necklace, and, without a word, handed it to Amos.

At once all talking ceased, and a deep silence pervaded the place, broken only by the crackling of the fire or the snarl of a dog outside. Every eye was fixed upon the badge, the symbol of so much power, as the catechist held it in his hand and examined it carefully.

Curious though they were to know the meaning of it all, they no longer questioned the messenger. That it was of supreme importance, they were well aware, but it was a custom of long standing that when the chief sent his badge of office, summoning his people together, the courier must be as silent as the grave. Only from the head of the tribe must the information be imparted, and then in solemn council.

For some time Amos sat in deep thought, still holding the necklace in his hand. At length he arose, and addressing a few words to the hunters who were present, passed with them out of the lodge. Going to the catechist's temporary shack, the men con-

versed long and earnestly together, and finally decided upon a definite line of action.

Early next morning, long before the sun had reddened the eastern horizon, four stalwart natives, including Amos, left the camp and set out upon different trails. Days passed by, and then bands of Indians began to straggle in. The nearest came first, erected their brush houses, and awaited the rest. At last the most remote arrived, and with them came Amos. Well had the couriers performed their task of gathering the hundreds of natives together for their march to Klassan.

It was a quaint, motley crowd, which one day broke up camp and filed out upon the narrow, winding trail. Sturdy hunters were there; buxom women, with bright-eyed pappooses strapped upon their broad backs; little children, youths and maidens, all with their burdens, according to their strength. Even the dogs, and they were almost numberless, carried their packs—from ten to thirty pounds. Little wonder that Amos looked upon the procession with a feeling of pride as it wound its way along sweeping valleys, through deep gorges and thick forests. Were they not his own people, and he their chosen leader?

Since the day of the wild storm, when Jennie had set forth from Klassan on her important errand, the weather had undergone a marked change. A soft wind blew in from the south, laden with messages of Spring. The sun no longer skimmed the horizon

for an hour or two and then disappeared. It now rode high, and poured its hot beams upon the great snowy waste. The trees, touched by wind and sun, dropped their white mantle and aroused from their long slumber. The brooks and rivulets, locked for months in an icy embrace, babbled once again, as they poured their icy waters down to the lordly Yukon. The River Kaslo began to struggle in the throes of a mighty upheaval. As a rule, the ice wore gradually away, and passed off too much decayed to cause any serious damage. But now it was different. The torrents of water hurled down from countless tributaries, large and small, lifted the solid mass and broke it into a million fragments. These, carried forward by the sheer force of the current, crashed and roared, tearing away thousands of tons of earth from the banks, and scraping the scarred rocks as clean as a bone. Some were piled up in the wildest confusion on point or headland, others rushing down became jammed in the Black Canyon, the most dreaded spot in the river. Day by day the mass rose higher, straining and groaning to free itself from its narrow prison and the weight of ice and water behind. But still it held firm in the terrible, vise-like grip of those flinty walls, and might hold for days, flooding the valleys for miles back, and threatening all before it with certain destruction. Never in the memory of the oldest native had Spring leaped forward so early with unsheathed

sword to deal such a sudden blow to its stern adversary, Winter.

The Indians marching to Klassan felt the change most keenly as they plodded wearily onward, wading in water to their knees, or sinking at every step into the soft snow. It was a weary and dispirited band which one night drew near the village. Silently they came—this army of the mountains—like grim spectres out of the darkness. The foremost reached the mission house, and paused in amazement at beholding nothing there except a heap of ruins. Others came up and crowded around in silent wonder. Was this all that remained of their supplies, the mission house filled with goodly treasures, the pride of the band? Then the truth flashed upon them—the white men had done it, had inflicted this base insult! From hundreds of lips at once arose a wild cry of sorrow and rage, which winging through the darkness, startled the miners from their sleep, and paled the cheeks of those gambling late in Perdue's store.

CHAPTER XXI

CONSTANCE'S VENTURE

THE night when the mission house was burned Caribou Sol slept on the floor in the Radhurst cabin. It was not an easy bed, but he did not mind.

"All the better fer bein' hard," he laughed, when Constance apologized for their poor accommodation. "I won't sleep too sound, an' I'll be able to keep an ear peeled fer them varmints."

Constance felt safer with the old man in the cabin, but still she could not sleep. What she had heard of the trail and the mystery regarding those letters kept her much perplexed. She thought, too, of Keith, out in the wild on that dreary night, and offered up a fervent prayer on his behalf. It was the first time that she had mentioned his name in her petitions, and a sweet, pleasant feeling stole into her heart.

At length the long dreary night wore away, and morning broke, flooding the whole land with joy and brightness after the furious storm. But among

the miners the day brought nothing but gloom, the memory of the wild revel and deed of destruction being too plainly evident. They realized when it was too late how far they had been led by Pritchen, and they naturally felt very sore. Many were the furtive glances cast towards the smouldering ruins of the mission house, while visions of revenging natives filled their minds. For days Perdue's store was packed with anxious men, discussing the affair in no uncertain language.

Caribou Sol carried the news to the Radhurst cabin.

"They're 'bout wild down yon," he said. "Fairly tumblin' over one another with excitement."

"Why, what's the matter?" questioned Constance.

"Afeered of Injuns, that's what's the matter. An' they've good reason to fear, too. If somethin' isn't done afore them natives come back, there'll be lively times around these diggin's."

"Can't the matter be settled with the old chief?" queried Mr. Radhurst. "Why not compensate him for the damage which has been done, and let him pacify his people?"

"They tried it, sir, but it wouldn't work. They sent several men up to the old chap to have a big pow-wow. They carried presents, too, but he wouldn't talk. He jist sat thar an' listened to 'em, though I don't believe he understood much. When they offered 'im the presents, he shook his head an'

pinted to the door, an' said somethin' in the Injun tongue which nearly scart 'em out of their wits."

"But surely the Indians are Christian enough not to take any wild revenge," said Constance. "Even though they will no doubt be angry when they find what has been done, don't you think that the teaching they have received for the past ten years will have some restraining influence?"

"I suggested that, Miss, down to the store, but I got only sneers fer my trouble. 'Religion,' says they with oaths, 'it's only skin deep. When they've clothes to wear, plenty to eat, an' things go their way, they're fine Christians then. But jist wait till ye see 'em look upon yon ruins, an' ye'll see how fer their religion goes. Our guns'll have more ininfluence then, than all their Bible pap.'

" 'Ye may be right,' says I; 'but we'll see.' "

"Oh, if only Mr. Steadman could be here when they return!" exclaimed Constance. "I know he could handle them better than any one else."

"Ay, ay, miss, there's no doubt about that. But, poor chap, I'm thinkin' he'll have enough to attend to out on the hills by this time."

"Is there much talk about him at the store?" asked Mr. Radhurst.

"No, sir. He's seldom mentioned. Once Pritchen made a remark about the trial, but, gittin' no encouragement, he shet up. The men are feelin' purty sore over the whole bizness. I begin to gather they

think there's somethin' crooked about the affair, though they say nothin' open. Pritchen seems to be the most unsettled one of the bunch. Not only is he dead scart of the Injuns, but he sees that the miners are turnin' agin 'im fer gittin' 'em into sich a scrape. The strange thing is that he's been mighty friendly with me of late, an' axed me a number of questions about you folk."

"About us?" cried Constance in surprise. "Why, what did he want to know?"

"Oh, nothin' much in perticular, only what yez were here fer, how long yez were goin' to stay, an' questions like that. I didn't give 'im much satisfaction, 'cept that yez were lookin' fer a relative, a young chap that come up here some time ago."

"And what did he say?"

"Seemed kinder surprised an' mighty interested when I told 'im yez were on the right track good an' hot; had discovered the lad's fiddle an' found out that the old chief has a picter of 'im."

" 'Do they know whar the Injun got the picter?' says he, sudden like.

" 'Not yit,' says I, 'but I'm thinkin' they'll find out.'

" 'How?' says he.

" 'I don't know,' says I, 'but sich things ginnerly come out in time.' At that he laughed as if it was a huge joke. He's a deep one that, fer sure, an' sometimes I think he knows more about the whole bizness

than he lets on. Thar's somethin' fishy, too, about his havin' that book, an' knowin' about them letters on that rock. It's mighty curious, an' I can't savvy it at all."

During the days that followed, Constance's mind was seriously perplexed. She longed to go to the old chief, and question him about the picture, but dreaded the undertaking, knowing nothing of the native language. If only Old Pete would come, he would go, for she had great confidence in the worthy prospector. She wondered why the delay, for he had expected to return in a short time with a supply of moose-meat. Then, the miners' fear concerning the arrival of the natives oppressed her heavily. For herself, she did not care so much, but when she looked upon her feeble father, and noticed his worn, brave face, her eyes would become moist. Often she would lie awake at night in her little room, thinking of it all. "What if the Indians should return to-night?" she said to herself, over and over and over again. "Would they know the difference between the innocent and the guilty, or would they serve all alike?"

At length the suspense became unbearable. Something must be done, or else she felt she would go crazy.

One bright afternoon, when her father was sleeping comfortably, she slipped out of the house and hurried down the narrow path to the Indian trail.

Up this latter she quickly moved, fearful lest the miners should see her. Reaching the top, she looked back, and breathed a sight of relief, for not a person was in sight. Had she known, however, that from a small cabin window, keen, cruel eyes were watching her every movement, and a cunning mind was revolving the purpose of her visit, she would have hesitated before advancing further.

Constance's heart beat fast as she knocked upon the door of the chief's lodge. A voice sounded within, but what it meant she could not tell. Nevertheless, she opened the door and entered. At first she could see very little, but her eyes becoming accustomed to the change, she at length observed the chief sitting upon the floor, while his wife sat a little distance away, busily engaged upon some beaded work.

A look of surprise passed over the chief's face when he saw the fair visitor standing before him. Then his old wrinkled visage broke into a smile, and he reached out a thin, scrawny hand in welcome.

Constance shrank inwardly from touching the extended member, but she knew it would not do to show any sign of fear or disgust.

"Good," said the chief, when she had complied with his wish, motioning her to a stool near by.

As Constance obeyed, she noticed that a lighted candle stood by the old man's side. Before him were two small pictures, which aroused her curios-

ity, for in the dimness of the cabin she could not tell what they were.

The chief loved pictures dearly, and because he was too old to read they were doubly precious. He treasured each one which the missionary had given him with the greatest care, and was never weary with asking questions about their meaning, till the complete stories were indellibly impressed upon his mind. What a comfort they had been to him through the long evenings, as he sat in the darkness of his cabin.

Since Jennie had left him, and the mission house had been burned, the chief had been fighting a hard battle with himself, and the crisis had just been reached when Constance arrived. He realized that when his people returned from the mountains and learned what had been done there would be much excitement and anger. Carried away by the impulse of the moment, they would be tempted to drive the whites out of Klassan in no gentle manner, unless restrained in time. They would look to him, their leader, and what was he to say? He himself was undecided. At times his old savage nature almost overwhelmed him when he brooded upon the injustice which had been done. At such moments, if the natives had returned, it would have gone hard with the miners. He thought of what the missionary had told him about Moses fighting great battles and defeating his enemies. Then he would bring out the picture of the patriarch, with his hands upheld by Aaron

and Hur, while the battle raged below. Would it not be right, he thought, to do the same now, and thus save his people?

But gradually the feeling of anger would pass away, and he would bring forth his other favourite picture of Christ hanging on the cross, and gaze for a long time upon it. This man was greater than Moses, so he had been told, in fact, the greatest who had ever lived, the Son of God. He forgave those who injured Him, and prayed for them with almost His last breath. For days, the power of the Man of Sorrows had been making itself felt in the old chief's heart, and then the picture of Moses was laid aside. But in an evil moment Pritchen had arrived, demanded the photograph of Kenneth Radhurst, and roused the chief's anger. In Indian and broken English he had vented upon the white man the fury of his wrath, and refused to grant his request.

Since then the two pictures were studied together, the struggle becoming fiercer all the time. How little the miners at Klassan realized that in that despised cabin their lives were being weighed in the balance; that light was contending with darkness; the love of Christ with the hatred of hell, and that only little was needed to decide one way or the other. Such was the condition when Constance arrived upon the scene.

Knowing nothing of the conflict which was raging in the chief's heart, Constance sat upon the rough

stool uncertain what to say. The flickering light of the candle fell upon her puzzled face, while her blue-veined hands lay clasped in her lap. It was a strange sight, worthy of the brush of a master, this fair woman, the stately flower of a dominant race, and the two old Indians, sere and withered, like clinging leaves in late November.

"Pretty picture," Constance at length remarked, breaking the silence, which was becoming painful.

"Good," answered the old man, lifting up his treasures with pride, and handing them to her. "Beeg chief," he continued, much pleased at the pale-face woman's interest. "You got all same peegee? You savvy 'um?"

Constance shook her head and smiled. "No, not like these. But I have one here, and she drew forth Kenneth's picture from beneath her jacket. "See."

The chief took it in his trembling hand, and held it up close to the candle. Then he turned it over, examined it carefully, while a surprised look passed over his face. Presently he reached to the left, and drew towards him a buckskin bag, and fumbling in this brought out the picture Pritchen had given him, the same one Jennie had copied. Finding it was safe, he appeared more satisfied, but still seemed much puzzled as he laid the two together and gazed earnestly upon them.

"All same peegee," he exclaimed at length. "You savvy 'um?"

"Yes," replied Constance, trembling with intense eagerness. "My brother."

"Ah," came the slow, unsatisfactory response.

"You know him?" she continued.

The old man shook his head. "Me no savvy."

"But where you get picture?" she persisted, pointing to the photograph.

Still he shook his head, and looked intently into Constance's face, as if to read the meaning of her words.

Suddenly a laugh filled the room, coarse and startling. It came from the old woman, who had been an amused and silent spectator of the whole scene. Then ensued an animated conversation between the aged pair, and, as Constance listened, without understanding a word, she noticed that the chief's face was clearing of its puzzled expression.

"Him no savvy," said the woman, turning to Constance. "Me savvy much. Me talk all same white man."

"Then you will tell me where that picture came from," replied Constance eagerly.

The woman chuckled and reached out a scrawny hand for the photograph.

"See um, peegee?" she demanded.

Constance nodded.

"Black bear geeve um dis."

"Black bear!" queried Constance in surprise, not

knowing that this was the most offensive epithet in the Tukudh vocabulary.

Again the old woman chuckled and grinned, exhibiting her toothless gums. Then she arose, and drawing close to Constance, pointed in the direction of the miners' cabins, while a fierce look came into her wrinkled face.

"There, there!" she cried. "Him there. Bad man. Black bear, ugh!"

"Who is he? Tell me his name," replied Constance, shrinking back involuntarily from the excited creature before her.

"No, me no savvy."

"What, don't know his name?"

"Me no savvy."

"But how did the chief get this picture?"

The old woman looked at her silently for a while, as if collecting her thoughts. Then, in broken English, she told her tale of the mean trick which had been imposed upon them. So vivid was the description that Constance knew it could be Pritchen and no one else. It came to her with a shock, for she feared him more than all the others, and somehow she felt that he was responsible for all the trouble which had taken place. How could she go to him and ask him what he knew? Would he not only laugh at her?

At length, sick at heart, she arose to go. Before

leaving, however, she shook hands with the chief, and turning to his wife, said:

"I want to thank the chief for giving medicine to heal my father."

"You fadder?" asked the woman in surprise.

"Yes, the missionary got it. My father was very sick, and it made him better. You tell chief that?"

"Me tell um by um by. Me glad." Suddenly she added: "You all same Clistin?"

"What?" and Constance looked her surprise.

"You all same Clistin? You pray?"

"Oh, yes, I pray, and try to be a Christian."

"You fadder all same Clistin?"

"Yes."

"Good. Me glad."

Then she added: "White man all Clistin?"

"No," answered Constance doubtfully.

"Some bad man Clistin, eh?"

This was certainly puzzling, and, receiving no reply, the native continued:

"Clistin burn mission house, eh?"

"No, no! A Christian would not do that. Only bad men. But look, all the men over there are not bad."

"Some good, eh?"

"Yes."

"Umph!" grunted the old woman, as she went back to her position on the floor, and continued her bead work.

As Constance left the lodge, she was surprised to find how dark it was. She had not noticed how the time had passed so intent had she been upon the object of her visit. She reproached herself for staying so late. What would her father say? And how uneasy he would be.

Quickly she hurried down the trail, fearful lest she should come in contact with any of the miners. Turning up the little path leading to her cabin, she gave a sigh of relief. No one would be there, as it was out of the regular thoroughfare. Just at this moment, when she felt quite secure, a figure loomed up suddenly before her and barred the way.

With a cry of mingled surprise and fear, Constance started back as she recognized Pritchen's burly form, and heard his sneering laugh.

"Frightened, are you?" he asked. "I must be a monster."

"What do you mean?" Constance demanded, summoning what courage she could. "How dare you stop me here in this lonely place!"

"Oh, just out for a stroll and happened to pass this way."

"Well, let me past, please."

"Yes, when I get ready. T'ain't often I have the pleasure of meeting such a fine, high-spirited lady in my nightly meditations."

"Will you let me pass?"

"You seem to be in a hurry."

"I am. My father is waiting for me, and will be anxious."

"Ha, ha, that's a good one. Now, you wouldn't be a bit uneasy about your dad if I happened to be the parson, would you?"

Constance was getting desperate, and not wishing to bandy words with the villain, made an effort to go by him.

"Oh, no, you don't do that," and an oath leaped from his vile mouth.

"Let me go by, I tell you."

"Yes, when I get what I want."

"Well, what is it? Tell me, quick."

"Visiting the old chief, eh?"

"Yes."

"Any success?"

"What do you mean?"

"Get the picture?"

"What picture? And why do you ask?"

"Oh, you know, well enough. The one the old devil has."

"He has my brother's picture, which I believe you gave him. I didn't get it, however, and maybe you'll tell me where you got it."

"Hell if I'll tell you, and what's more, I believe you've got it, and I want it."

"But I tell you I didn't get it."

"Oh, that's a fine story. Didn't get it! But I believe you did, and I want it."

Constance looked around, as if seeking some avenue of escape. What was she to do? Alone there with such a villain! Should she cry for help?

Pritchen seemed to read her thoughts.

"It's no use to run or make a fuss," he growled. "You can't get clear of me, and you'll soon be choked off if you start to do any croaking. You might as well make up your mind at once, and hand out that picture."

"But I tell you I haven't got it," she persisted. "Oh, please, please, let me go. Have you no pity at all?"

"Give me that picture, or by heavens, I'll take it!" and he sprang forward, and seized her with his rough hands.

With one piercing cry, Constance struggled to free herself from his terrible clutches, while her brain reeled as she felt herself being borne to the ground. Just when the last hope of help had fled, a harsh growl and a roar fell upon her ears, while out of the night sprang a dark object, and hurled itself full upon the villain bending over her. The last that Constance heard was Pritchen's cry of rage and fear as he struggled with his antagonist, and then she fell back unconscious upon the trail.

CHAPTER XXII

OLD PETE

WHEN Old Pete left Klassan, and went back to Siwash Creek with Keith's dogs, he expected to return in a short time with a supply of moose-meat. But the game was scarce, and he was forced to go far afield before meeting the proud monarchs of the forest. It led him into a new region, where he spent some time in prospecting a ledge of rocks, which showed indications of gold-bearing ore. By the time he again reached his own cabin Spring was upon him, and the snow was rapidly disappearing from the ground.

One day he spent at Siwash Creek, packing up his meagre household belongings, and that evening Alec McPherson came to visit him. This sturdy son of the heather looked with surprise upon the dismantled room, and turned inquiringly to his companion.

"What, mon, are ye awa' sae soon!" he exclaimed. "I thought ye would stay wi' us noo."

Pete did not seem to hear this remark, but con-

tinued stuffing several articles of wearing apparel into an old canvas sack. When the last pair of socks had been carefully stowed away, and the bag deposited in one corner of the room, he suddenly asked:

"What's the news from Klassan, Alec?"

"Nothing, Pete. Since ye came from yon, we've had never a word. The big storm blocked the trail, an' atop o' that came the thaw, an' the water noo is a-spillin' owre the land."

"What! no word from the parson or the lassie?"

"None."

"Wall, then, Alec, I'm a-goin' down, as fast as them hounds'll take me. I'm anxious to hear some word."

"But ye won't strike the trail noo, mon, in its bad condeetion? Stay here till things settle doon a bit."

Seating himself upon a stool Pete began to whittle at a small plug of tobacco, and then deliberately filled an old blackened pipe before replying.

"Sit down, Alec," he demanded at length. "Thar's somethin' on me mind I want to tell ye. Ye've been a good friend to me, man, an' I kin never fergit it. We've trod the trails together fer years, but I'm a-thinkin' we'll do it no more."

"Tut, tut, mon, what's come owre ye? Haven't we fine prospects in sight anent the summer?"

"Ay, ay, Alec, it's true what ye say. But haven't

we allus had fine prospects in sight? Tell me that. An' what have we got? I'll tell ye what we've got. We've got old age pilin' a-top of us; we've got stiff jints, an' rheumatiz a-plenty; an' we've got a cabin apiece. That's what we've got, Alec, a-trailin' after this devil gold. We're gittin' old, man, an' the things we should have we haven't got, I tell ye that plain."

"Why, Pete, I thought ye liked the life, sae grand an' free, wi' the great works o' Nature all around ye. Didn't ye often say ye could never live in harness, but wanted the wild always fer yer hame?"

"Sure, man, I know I said it, but I've been a-thinkin' different of late. Out in yon new region I've had strange thoughts, an' they overcome me. Thinks I to meself, I'm an old man without a home, an' no one to care for me whether I come or go. What's the use of me a-rustlin' fer a home-stake when there's never a one to share it with me? The wild life may be fine to read about in stories an' sich like, an' the young chaps may like it, but I want a home now; I want some one to care fer, an' to care fer me. What good is all the gold in the warld, Alec, when ye haven't a wife or kiddies to brighten yer cabin?"

"Ye're owre late thinkin' aboot sic things," said Alec rather dryly, puffing away at his pipe.

"I know it, man, I know it. But hearken. I've a son an' a daughter now in me old age, an' though they're neither kith nor kin of mine, they're very

close to me, an' I love 'em. They've been good to me, an' I want to be near 'em. They're now at Klassan, so that's why I'm a-goin' thar."

"An' how lang will ye stay doon yon? Will ye no wark?"

"Make a livin', man? I'm not a-worrin' about that. All my life long the good Lord has provided fer me better than I desarved, an' if He cares fer the flowers an' the birds He'll not abandon an old man, never ye fear that. But thar'll be wark, Alec, an' these rough hands'll not be idle as long as life is in this carcase."

"May God bless ye, Pete!" and Alec stretched out his horny right hand. Then in the silence of that little cabin these two hardy prospectors joined hands, while their eyes filled with tears, at what they felt was at last the parting of the ways.

Some time before Pete reached Klassan the trail became so bad that it was impossible for the dogs to drag the sled with its load of meat and the prospector's small outfit. The only thing to do was to cache the supplies up between three trees, on a triangular scaffold made of fir poles.

"Thar, laddies," said Pete, when the task was finished, "it's safe at any rate, an'll keep till we kin come fer it."

With a small pack on his back and rifle in his hand, he pushed forward, with the dogs bounding

along-by his side, glad of the freedom from harness. Night had shut down over the land when at length the lights of Klassan came into view.

"We'll soon be thar, b'ys," encouraged the old man, "an' I reckon yer master'll be mighty glad to see us. Mebbe he'll have some supper ready, though it is late, an' we won't be sorry, hey, Yukon?" and he gave the faithful brute an affectionate pat on the head.

Into the village he strode, past the store, the miners' cabins, and up the trail toward the Indian encampment. He had just reached the forks of the road when a heart-rending cry for help split the air. Pete paused in amazement, while with a roar Brisko bounded forward. It was a woman's voice, he was sure of that, and his heart beat fast when he realized that there was only one white woman in the place. With Pete to think was to act, and springing up the trail with huge strides, he soon reached the spot where the prostrate woman lay. He saw the dark figure on the ground and heard the crashing of the bushes through which Pritchen was struggling, at the same time beating off the furious onset of the dog.

Pete lost not an instant, but drawing forth his match case, made of two cartridge shells fitted closely together, he struck a light, and as it flashed upon Constance's face so still and white, a deep groan escaped his lips.

"My God," he cried, looking wildly around. "Whar is the villain who has done this?"

Throwing aside his pack he stooped down, and lifting up the inanimate form in his strong arms, carried her up the hill as tenderly as a mother would bear her little child.

"Poor lassie! Poor lassie!" he crooned. "What has happened? Who could frighten sich a sweet lamb? But never mind, Pete is here, an' he'll look inter this bizness later."

When Constance opened her eyes she found herself lying in her own home, with her father and old Pete standing anxiously by the couch. She tried to rise, but, feeling rather unsteady, was glad to lie down again.

"What has happened?" she asked, "or have I been dreaming? Where is that terrible man?"

"Hush, darling," replied her father soothingly. "Lie still and rest awhile, and you will soon be strong."

"Ye've been dreamin', lassie," said Pete, delighted to know that Constance was recovering. "Ye've had bad visions, an' so fergot yer supper. It's all ready, an' yer dad's been waitin' fer ye to wake up fer some time."

Constance found it very pleasant to be there, weak though she was, listening to the old man's words, and to feel so secure.

"Please tell me how I got here," she asked, look-

ing up at the prospector. "I think you had much to do with my rescue."

"Tut, tut, lassie, never ye mind that now. Drink this hot tea, an' eat this cracker, then we'll tell ye all about it."

While Constance obeyed this injunction, her father and Pete ate their supper at the little table near by. The latter was hungry, very hungry, as it had been hours since he had tasted any food. He asked no question, and seemed to be the most free-from-care fellow in the world. In his quaint way he told stories of his frontier life, till Constance found herself alternately weeping and laughing at his tales of pathos and humour. But if any one could have looked below the mere surface of words, he would have seen how anxious Pete was to hear the whole story of the night, and how the missionary was getting along. Not, however, till the colour had been somewhat restored to Constance's cheeks, the dishes cleared away, and the men seated by the couch, was the tale of adventure related. Then followed the account of Keith's troubles, his trial, and expulsion. Mr. Radhurst told of the latter, as Constance found herself unequal to the task so painful was the memory of it all.

Pete sat on the stool drinking in every word, with his eyes fixed full upon the face of the narrator. At times his huge frame trembled with emotion, and a groan escaped his lips. It was only when Mr. Rad-

hurst had finished that he leaped to his feet and gave vent to his pent-up feelings.

"Oh, God!" he cried, shaking his fist in the direction of the saloon. "Let me live long enough, to punish that villain, that devil!—what's his name, did ye say?"

"Pritchen, Bill Pritchen," replied Mr. Radhurst.

"Bill Pritchen, ye scoundrel, ye'll answer fer this, an' to Pete Martin at that!"

He was about to say more when he suddenly stopped, and a look of remorse crossed his face, as he saw Constance lying on the couch so very still. He seemed to read reproach and wonder in her clear eyes.

"Fergive me, lassie!" he cried. "I didn't mean to frighten ye. But I do feel bad, thar's no mistake."

"Don't mind me, Pete," said Constance, "for I am rather unstrung this evening. But there is one thing which has been worrying me much, and I would like to speak about it now."

"Go ahead, then," and Pete once more resumed his seat.

"Father told you the story of that man dying out in the Ibex cabin, and that the letters on the rock are the same as on the empty poke which was found in that chest. It's a wonder Mr. Steadman didn't say something about it."

"He did, lassie. He did."

"Not to us."

"No, not to you; but he told it to me."

"Who was the man, then, oh, please tell us!" and Constance rose to a sitting posture in her eagerness.

"Lassie," and Pete spoke very slowly, "I don't mind tellin' ye now; mebbe it's best ye should know. That chap was yer brother!"

If the prospector expected an outburst of lamentation at this announcement he was much disappointed. Startling though it was, father and daughter uttered not a word, but sat very still. The news was not altogether unexpected, for often had they discussed the matter when alone, and had reached the conclusion that it could be none other than Kenneth who had died in the cabin. And yet, mingled with this idea, there was the faint hope that they might be mistaken, and that their loved one some day would be given back to them. But now the last slender thread was snapped to which they had clung so long.

For a while Constance sat motionless on the couch, looking into Pete's face. But she saw him not, for her mind was elsewhere, drifting, drifting far away to other days. She did not notice when Mr. Radhurst left his seat and came close to her side. But when he put his arms tenderly around her, and drew her close to him, she awoke from her reverie. Then when she saw the pained look on her father's face, and the tears which were stealing down his faded

cheeks, she threw her arms about his neck and sobbed like a child.

For some time no one spoke, and Old Pete sat silently by, a sympathetic witness of the little scene. "It will do the lassie good," he said to himself. "If them tears hadn't come I'd be a-feered, jist as I would of a biler without any safety valve."

After awhile Constance dried her eyes and, turning to Pete, apologized for her emotion.

"But then, I know, you understand. Kenneth was so dear to us—and to think that we shall never see him again!"

"Don't say that, lassie. As ye are a Christian woman ye must believe that ye'll meet yer brother agin, when them pearly gates are opened. I was jist a-thinkin' how once I uster laugh at the idea of a future life. Says I to meself, an' to others, 'This life is enough fer me, so I'll have a good time now.' But as I growed older I began to see, an' it all come gradual like, that this life is only a trail after all. Now, ye see, we have nothin' but trails here, an' purty tough ones at that. By an' by thar'll be roads, an' then when them cities git built thar'll be paved streets. Then when us old pioneers walk on them fine, level highways we'll think of the time when only trails ran here, an' we'll be mighty proud to tell others that we've roughed it a bit. So, lassie, when mushin' over a hard trail, I says to meself that it's jist like life. Some day thar'll be the Holy

City we read about, whar the streets are paved with gold, an' if we are to enjoy them thar we must be willin' fust to tramp the trails down here awhile. I know that larned men would laugh at this idea of mine, but I tell ye it's been a heap of comfort to me in my lonely life. But the parson'll tell ye all about it some day better'n I kin."

"So you think he will come back again?" asked Constance eagerly.

"Come back? Certainly he'll come back. He ain't made of sugar an' water. He'll not desart his flock long fer a pack of wicked fools. He knows the good Lord's with 'im, an'll not let his wark be ruined. I reckon that even now he's a-doin' his Master's will somewhar out on them mountains."

"I wonder much why he didn't tell us about Kenneth's death. Was there a reason?"

"Thar was, lassie. Ye was in a big trouble when he fust met ye, an' he kept it from yez both fer fear it would be too much to bear. He did it fer kindness sake, an' wished to wait till things settled down a bit."

"Are you sure that was his reason?"

"Sartin. Didn't he tell me so when we talked the matter over together?"

Constance sat for some time in deep thought, while Pete and her father talked on. Keith would come back. There was comfort, nay, more, there was

joy, in the hope, and then she would thank him for his thoughtfulness.

Suddenly a wild cry fell upon their ears—a cry of sorrow and rage, which paled their cheeks and caused them to look at one another with apprehension.

"The Injuns! The Injuns have come!" cried Pete, rushing to the door. "My God, I feered it!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RUMBLING OF THE STORM

AFTER the Indians' cry had rung through Klassan there was no more sleep for the miners. Excitement reigned in each cabin, where men waited and wondered what the night would bring forth. Visions filled their minds of tales they had heard, and stories they had read, of enraged natives falling suddenly upon bands of white people and wiping them out of existence in the most cruel manner.

Following the yell came a silence as deep as death. Listen and watch as they might, no signal came from that quiet camp, and Night kept her secret well. Some, imagining they saw Indians stealthily creeping down upon them, sat or stood with rifles at their side, determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. But as the slow hours dragged by, and nothing happened, the suspense became so unbearable that with one accord they made their way to the saloon. Here morning found them earnestly discussing the situation, and planning some method of

defense. Sighs of relief escaped from many a lip as the light struggled in through the dirty window, filling them with new courage.

It is marvellous what a magical effect the day possesses. Men who, through the dreary night of doubt and fear, are veritable cowards, will then become the most arrogant boasters. So several who raised the loudest lamentations of apprehension now proved the greatest talkers.

"Give us daylight," said one, "and I reckon we can stand off a whole horde of redskins."

"Don't be too certain about that," replied another. "If those Indians make up their minds to wipe us out, it's all the same as if we were dead men."

"But can't we stand a siege here, and mow them down as they come up?" persisted the other.

"Mow them down! Mow the devil down! Why, they're five to one, and, if they rushed us, where'd we be? But never fear, that's not their way of working. They'll not run any unnecessary risk when they've got night in which to do the job. If it comes to a hand-and-hand tussle we're out of it, that's all there is about it. They're as tough and supple as mountain ash, and are always in training, while we're as soft as a lot of kids."

The sun rose above the lofty peaks and swung high in the heavens, but still the Indians maintained their silence and showed no sign of hostility. Midday came, and yet no signal.

"I guess they'll do nothing," suggested one. "Maybe they're afraid of our guns."

Just then the mournful sound of an Indian drum fell upon their ears, causing them all to start and look at one another. What did it mean? Were they gathering for the affray?

As they listened and waited Old Pete drew near and entered the building. He was a stranger there, and the men gazed with wonder and admiration upon the hardy prospector. His great stature, commanding presence, buckskin suit, hawk-like eye, and long, flowing beard streaked with gray, would have made him a marked man in any company. But his sudden appearance at such a time made a strong impression.

"Who is he? Where did he come from?" passed from lip to lip, as Pete strode up to the bar and confronted Perdue, who was standing blandly at his post.

"Any baccy?" he inquired, glancing at the array of black bottles along the wall.

"Plenty, pard. What's yer choice?"

"Yer best, an' I guess that'll be none too good."

"Now, what'll ye have next?" and Perdue rubbed his fat hands in anticipation of a new customer.

"A match."

"What! nothing more? What's yer brand?"

"Ain't got any, 'cept old age, an' the good Lord

done that Himself. Guess He brands us all the same way sooner or later."

"Oh, I don't mean that," retorted the saloon-keeper, somewhat nettled at the laugh from the men at his expense. "I mean, 'What de'ye drink?' "

"Oh, I see," and Pete stroked his beard meditatively. "Wall, t'stimerlate the heart I sometimes drink the water of Life; to freshen up the mind a bit, I swaller a few drops from the mighty spring of Nater; while to keep this old carcase bright I find the good Lord's sparklin' water jist the thing. Have ye ever tried it?"

Perdue was certainly puzzled. It was impossible to take offence at the old man's words, spoken so quietly and impressively. Neither could he detect any sign of fun-making in his open face and kindly eyes. He wondered if this giant were altogether sane. He had often heard stories of men who, living so long in lonely places, had become quite demented. Perhaps this was one of them.

"Yer a stranger here, are ye not?" he asked not ungently. "Where did ye drop from?"

"Jist from the Injun camp up yon."

"What! not from there!" and Perdue looked his surprise.

"Sartin. Been strollin' round, sizin' things up a bit."

"But wasn't ye afraid of the Injuns? I understand they're as mad as hornets."

"Mebbe they be, an' I guess ye're right. But they never sting a friend. They know Pete Martin purty wall by this time."

"What! you're not Pete Martin, the prospector, are you?" and Perdue's eyes opened with astonishment.

And not only was the saloon-keeper surprised. The men in the room moved a little nearer, and craned their necks to obtain a better view of the stranger. Much had they heard of him: his great strength, wonderful endurance, feats of daring, and simplicity of life.

"Way back in New Brunswick," replied the prospector, "the old Parish Register says that I was baptized Peter Bartholomew Martin. I was ginnerally known, however, as 'Pete,' while up here I only git 'Old Pete,' though it doesn't make any difference what a feller's called. I guess the Lord'll know me by any name; I only hope so."

"But what are the Indians doing?" asked one of the men.

"Doin'? What ain't they a-doin'! They're gittin' down to bizness mighty lively; that's what they're a-doin'."

"In what way?"

"Wall, they're tryin' to decide whether it's best to pinch only the ones who burnt their store, or to hand out a bunch to the whole gang. Ye see, it's this way," and Pete glanced around upon the eager

listeners, "they're sorter divided like, some wantin' to go the limit, an' others not. Now, the ones who hold back are the rale Christians, the best men of the lot. This camp jist depends upon which side wins out, an' if ye're saved ye may give the credit to that parson chap ye hiked away from here in sich a mighty hurry."

"We're better rid of him," said Perdue.

"Ye may think what ye like, pard; it's a free country in that way. But let me remind ye that if ye'd done this same trick to them Injuns ten years ago, when I fust struck these diggin's, they'd a wiped ye out quicker'n ye could say Jack Rabbit."

"Ye seem to know a heap about things here for a stranger," remarked Perdue.

"Ay, it's true, man, what ye say. I ain't been here long, but long enough to find out a few things, 'specially 'bout that fine lassie up yon."

"Why, what about her?" asked several.

"What! didn't ye hear?"

"Hear what?"

" 'Bout the chap that caught her on the trail last night, an' scart her so that she fainted dead away."

At this, several men who were sitting on benches sprang to their feet, and angry oaths rang through the room.

"Who was it?" they demanded. "Tell us more about it! We're bad men, God knows, but we've a little manhood left. Tell us his name!"

"Don't git excited, now," replied Pete. "Jist keep cool, an' don't do nothin' rash, or ye may be sorry fer it."

Then in his quaint way he told the story of his trip from Siwash Creek, the cry in the night, the attack of the dog, escape of the villain, and the finding Constance lying unconscious on the trail. Pete related his story well, while many a muttered oath burst from the men during the recital.

"Do you know his name?" came the cry.

"Yes."

"Is he here?"

"I don't know. Mebbe ye kin tell when ye hear, fer it's Bill Pritchen."

When Pete entered the saloon, Pritchen was sitting at a small table dealing a pack of cards. Looking suddenly up, and noticing the prospector, his face became pale, and his hand shook. He made up his mind to leave the room at the first opportunity and not run the risk of meeting the old man. Anyway, his back was to the bar, so he would not be recognized. As Pete talked on he felt somewhat relieved. But when the story of darkness began to be unrolled a great fear seized his cowardly heart. He did not dare to leave the place, for if his name were mentioned he must be on hand to defend himself before the miners became too much excited. During the recital a burning rage possessed him, and he longed to drop the prospector in his tracks.

He saw the trap which he had laid for another about to close upon himself with a deadly grip, and all owing to this one old man. When, however, Pete mentioned his name, he leaped to his feet with a terrible oath.

"You lie!" he shouted., "It's an infernal lie, I tell you, and you'll answer for this!"

Pete swung suddenly around, and looked full upon the irate man before him.

"So yer the gintleman, are ye? I'm rale glad to make yer acquaintance. Mebbe ye kin explain matters, an' unravel this tangle a bit."

"There's nothing to explain, d— you! I was out walking last night and met Miss Radhurst on the trail. Just as I was about to pass her a brute of a dog fell suddenly upon me, and tore my clothes, while the young woman fell to the ground in a dead faint."

"Oh, that's the way ye put it, is it? An' so ye left the young lassie a-lyin' thar on the snow, while ye took to yer heels with the dog after ye. Didn't ye stop to think that there might be other dogs around what would hurt the woman? Oh, no, ye never thought of that. Ye may tell what ye like, but that lassie up yon has another story, which I jist told."

"It's a lie, I tell you; a job put up against me! and you, you confounded meddler, will answer for this!"

"Mebbe I will, man," and Pete's eyes gleamed with a light which spoke danger. "At present the matter lies atween you an' the lassie, so I leave the b'ys here to jedge which to believe. But as we are now acquainted, I'd like to ax ye another question."

"Spit it out, then."

"Haven't I seed ye afore, Bill Pritchen?"

"H— if I know."

"But ye do know. Ye know very well that I met ye on the trail in 'Dead Man's Land,' last Fall."

"You must have been dreaming then."

"No, I wasn't a-dreamin' an' ye know I wasn't."

"Well, suppose you did meet me, what of it?"

"I'll tell ye what I want," and Pete moved nearer. "I want to know what's become of that fine young chap what was out with ye, the lad what had the fiddle?"

"How do I know? I can't keep track of every idiot who happens to meet me on the trail and travels along with me for a time."

"But I tell ye ye do know, an' what's more, I'm here to find out."

"Then you'll find out something else!" cried Pritchen, as his hand dropped to his hip pocket.

He was quick, but Pete was quicker, for almost like a flash a huge hand reached out, seized the revolver, and wrenched it from the villain's grasp. With an oath the latter sprang forward to strike, but he was as a child in the giant's terrible grip.

He struggled for awhile, writhed in agony, and then sank upon the floor.

"Git up, ye coward! Git up, an' answer me!"

Pete's voice was terrible, and his eyes blazed as he bent over the prostrate man, who made no effort to move.

"Git up, I tell ye!" again came the command. "Git up an' explain what ye did to Kenneth Radhurst!"

Receiving no reply, he continued:

"Then I'll tell the men what ye did, ye coward. Ye left 'im a sick man, to starve, to die in the Ibex cabin; that's what ye did. Ye stole his gold, an' left 'im thar."

"You lie!" came from the prostrate man.

"It's no lie, I tell ye that. An' what's more, when the parson came along, cared fer 'im, an' when he died buried 'im, ye made out that he killed 'im. Ye went sneakin' around an' found a book he left thar, an' tried to stir up the men here at Klassan agin 'im. That's what ye did."

A cry of rage burst from the miners as they listened with amazement to this revelation.

"Is it true?" they shouted, as they surged near. "Tell us, is it true?"

"It's not true! By heavens, it's a lie!" and Pritchen, with face pale as death, struggled to his feet and faced the angry men.

"Stand back, b'ys, stand back!" cried Pete. "Lave 'im to me! He's injured 'im that's as dear to me as the apple of me eye. Lave 'im to me!"

Just what would have happened is hard to tell, if at that moment three Indians had not entered the room. One was Amos, the catechist, who was accompanied by three stalwart hunters.

In the exciting affray between Pete and Pritchen the Indians for a time had been forgotten. But the presence of these natives recalled their uncertain position, and with one accord they turned their attention to the visitors.

For a few minutes silence reigned in the room, and then Amos stepping forward delivered his message in broken English.

"Pale-face brothers," he began. "The Tukudhs come back from hunt. Dey find store burn, teacher gone. Beeg chief call Council. He want pale face come. Amos has spoke."

With this the catechist stepped back by the side of his companions, who had remained perfectly erect during it all.

Among the miners there was a hurried whispered conversation, and at length Caribou Sol arose to speak.

"Whar," he asked, "will the Council be held?"

"On de flat, at foot of hill. Half way," replied Amos.

"When?"

"Bime by, to-day. Two, mebbe tree hour. Beeg chief wait word."

"All right, then. Go an' tell the chief that the white men will come to the Council. Is that the will of all?" and Sol glanced around the room.

"Ay, ay," came the response as one voice. "It is well."

"It is well," repeated Amos, as he and his companions turned and left the building.

Pritchen, too, hastened away. In the excitement of the moment no one thought of him. Terrified, filled with rage, he reached his own cabin, stumbled through the door, and flung himself upon his cot.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COUNCIL

THE miners' cabins at Klassan were erected on a level strip of land along the Kaslo River. Upon the hill above nestled the Indian camps, secure from the wild north wind in winter, and the over-flowing stream in the springtime. At the foot of the hill was a space of ground, covered in summer with wild grass, but now denuded of every sign of vegetation. This spot was chosen by the Indians for the holding of the Council as being half way between the two settlements. Here, too, the earth was dry, free from the mud which was found so abundantly elsewhere. Near by stood several fir trees, gaunt and half dead, through whose naked branches the storms had howled for many years.

It was a bright spring day, and the sun riding high poured its hot beams upon the land. Masses of fleecy clouds drifted overhead, and early-returned birds flitted through the air or chirped and twittered among the trees. Everything in Nature spoke

of peace; peace in the great blue vault above; peace in the air, and peace on earth. Most fitting was the day for men of different tongues, different races and different modes of life to meet together in sacred Council for the settling of their disputes.

No intimation was given, no sign was vouchsafed to the miners as they gathered there, that miles up the river millions of tons of water were ready to burst their bonds, and sweep down upon them their fearful besom of destruction.

It was late ere the Indians arrived, and the miners became much impatient. When at length they did appear, they seemed to the white men like an army marching to battle. The old chief led the way with uncertain steps. Behind him came scores of hunters, great, stalwart men some of them, regular Anaks in girth and stature.

They were a proud race of men, unsubdued and untarnished by contact with civilization. And good reason was there for their proud bearing and firm, elastic step as they moved along the trail. Was not the land theirs? Had they not received it from a long line of ancestors? No sword had ever conquered them, and no foreign yoke had ever been placed upon their necks. The birds of the air, the fishes of the streams, the lordly moose of the forests, and the bighorn sheep of the mountains—all were theirs. And so they came to the Council, not as suppliants, not as beggars, but as free men, in whose

veins flowed the blood of a race which will break, but not bend. How many, oh, how many before them, throughout the length and breadth of North America, had drawn near in the same spirit to greet their pale-face brothers in open Council. They too had assembled with weapons laid aside, with confidence in their faces, and peace in their hearts, only to find in the end treachery for goodwill, betrayal for trust, and contempt for respect. Could these sturdy Tukudhs have looked forward to the day when their land would be flooded by thousands of greedy gold seekers, their game slaughtered, and their sons and daughters demoralized by bad whiskey, their attitude would have been very different to these forelopers of a foreign race.

On the ground a wolf-skin robe was placed, and upon this the old chief squatted, facing the miners. Around him gathered the hunters of his band, two hundred strong, in the form of a semicircle. There was no haste, no jostling one another as they took their various positions. Everything was done quietly and with much decorum, the younger giving the foremost places to their elders.

By the side of the chief stood Amos, who was to act as interpreter, dressed in a simple hunting costume. His face bore an expression of care, and ever and anon he cast anxious glances towards the Indians and then at the white men. To him the day had been one of severe strain, and he knew the end

was not yet. In the Indian Council he had fought a hard battle against the hot-headed youths who thirsted for revenge upon the miners. With infinite patience, much tact and burning eloquence he had pleaded for the Christlike virtue of forgiveness. He listened to their harangues, settled disputes and appealed to their higher nature. He sketched their mode of living ten years before, and emphasized the changes which had taken place upon the arrival of the missionary. After hours of discussion the matter reached a deadlock, so it was left for the old chief to decide. He favoured peace, and gave as his reasons for this conclusion the Christian teaching he had received, and the friendly visit of the pale-face maiden to his lodge."

"Let the guilty men be punished," he had said in conclusion. "Let us not do it in the spirit of revenge, but only as a warning to others."

Squatting upon the wolf-skin robe the chief now scanned the miners as intently as his weak eyes would permit, and then addressed a few words to the interpreter.

"Pale-face brothers," began Amos, turning to the white men, "chief of Tukudhs give you welcome to Council. He come here with peace in heart. His hunters all leave guns in camps, dey trust white man. But white man no trust Tukudh. Dey come with guns. Dey keep guns in hand. Old chief moche sorry."

The miners looked at one another when Amos ended, uncertain what to do.

"Stack yer guns, b'ys," demanded Old Pete, who was the only one among them without a rifle. "Be fair to the Injuns an' they'll be fair to us."

"Well said," replied Caribou Sol, and suiting the action to the word, he stepped forward and laid his weapon in the open space of ground, half way between the two parties.

One by one the rest of the miners went forward, and in the same manner deposited their rifles.

A general exclamation of "Ah, ah," from the natives signified their approval of this friendly act.

But still something disturbed the chief. He looked long and intently at the white men, and again spoke to Amos.

"De chief," explained the latter to the miners, "ask if white man all here?"

"No," responded Sol, who had been requested by his companions to act as spokesman, "there are two absent, the gray-haired man up in yon cabin, and Bill Pritchen."

"De chief only want Bill," was the response. "He no want ole man in cabin on hill."

"But mebbe he won't come. Can't we git along without 'im?"

When this was communicated to the chief he shook his head.

"We wait den till Bill come," and having said this Amos moved back a few steps.

The Indians maintained a stolid silence as they watched the miners discussing the matter.

"Fetch 'im," said Old Pete. "Why should he stay away. I guess he'll be needed."

And so it was decided that several should go in search of Pritchen and bring him as quickly as possible. This was received with evident satisfaction on both sides, and operations for a time were suspended.

Pritchen was found in his cabin, and expressed himself as quite unwilling to attend the Council. His face told most plainly the state of his mind, which was far from enviable. At times the longing seized him to flee into the wilderness—anywhere would be better than Klassan he thought. But this he knew was not practicable, for the Indian hunters, with the instinct of sleuth hounds, would track him down in a short time. While he waited and listened the messengers drew near.

"I'll not go, d— you!" he cried. "Leave me alone, can't you?"

"Well, if you won't come peaceably," replied one, "we'll not try to force you now. But I think it's better for you to come quietly along with us than to have the gang to come after you. There'll be no coaxing if they come, I tell you that."

Pritchen fully realized the truth of these words, so after a few moments of hesitation he agreed to comply with the request.

As he drew near to the Council ground a nameless fear took possession of him. He saw the miners shrug their shoulders as he took his place among them. They seemed to forget his presence, however, as they turned their attention to the old chief to watch his next move. Neither did they have to wait long, for with much deliberation and many gestures, the hoary patriarch began his harangue.

First, he invoked the aid of the Great Father of Heaven upon the gathering. Then he told of the nobleness of his race, of the mighty men and warriors who had died. He described the vastness of the land which they had owned from time immemorial. He next gave an account of their wild condition before the arrival of the missionary.

"We were brutes," he said in substance, flourishing his arm in an eloquent manner. "We had many wives and treated them worse than dogs. They cut and drew our wood; they brought in the moose, when killed, into camp, and waited upon us, doing our slightest bidding. When they refused to work we beat them, and when too old to toil we turned them out to die, or left them on the trail. Our wives, dreading such a life for their little girl babies, often killed them and we thought nothing of it.

"We robbed, cheated, fought and killed one another. Our hearts were always bad, all same black bear. We were like men walking at night in a thick wood, lost and unable to find our way out. Oh, it was a bad time! Then the teacher came to us from beyond the great mountains. He lived in our midst, and learned our language. At first we treated him very badly and tried to kill him, but we could not, for something stopped us. When we shot at him the arrows and balls went wide. When we threw our knives and hatchets they did not touch him. When we broke down his cabin and stole from him, he prayed for us, and built a new house. When we were sick, he healed us. When we wanted food he shared with us of his own supply. He led us slowly out of the wood. He told us about Christ and another life. He taught us how to build good cabins, and live as true Christians. Thus the Spirit came to us like the breath of Spring, and thawed and warmed our cold hearts. New, sweet flowers of love, truth, purity and peace sprang up, which choked and killed the bad weeds. We put away our old manner of living. We cared for our children, treated our wives better, built a church, school room and store. We lived happier, with plenty to eat and to wear, and looked forward to another life after death. Then the miners came; they built cabins in our midst, dug our land for gold, and tried to ruin our

young men and women. They drove away our teacher, and burnt our store. Our men have come back from the hunting grounds; they find what has been done, and are very angry.

" 'Are we not men?' say they. 'We will fight and drive out the strangers.' But the Spirit conquers; it holds them back. 'Call a Council,' it says. 'Gather the white men, and let them punish the ones who injured us.'

"In your midst stands one man who has caused all the trouble. His heart is bad, like the heart of a black bear. He wronged our teacher; he stole gold; he put it in the mission house; hid it there. He said our teacher did it. He laughed at him, and drove him from Klassan. He is there! He is there!" and the chief stretched out his hand and pointed straight at Pritchen, who shrank back as from a terrific blow.

The speaker was about to proceed, but ere he could utter another word Old Pete sprang forward, and with blazing eyes confronted the Indian who had made this serious charge.

"Tell me!" he cried, "is it true? Is it true what ye say about the missionary? Is the skunk among us what done that deed? Tell me, quick!"

"Over there," replied Amos, pointing to the wretched Pritchen.

"It's a lie! A d— lie, I tell you!" shouted the

latter. "I know nothing about it! The Injun hates me, and wants to ruin me. Let them prove it, if they can! They can't do it!"

Pete was about to turn towards him with angry words on his lips, when cries of rage from the miners caused him to hesitate, and to realize his position. The men were thoroughly aroused, he knew that, and ready to fall upon the villain without more ado. That the scoundrel needed a severe punishment there was no doubt, but he wished to be just and not let the base mob instinct rule.

"B'ys!" he shouted, "jist wait a leetle, afore ye do anything rash. Let the Injun prove to us first what he says is true. It may be all imagination."

"Injun speak true," said Amos somewhat indignant to think that the chief's words should be doubted.

"What ye say may be kerrect," replied Pete, "but all we ax is fer ye to show yer proof. How d'ye's know that Pritchen put the gold in the cabin?"

"Jennie see 'um."

"Jennie who?"

"Jennie. Yukon Jennie. Injun squaw. She see 'um. She tell old chief."

"Whar is she then?" and Pete looked around as if expecting to see the girl.

"Up dere," and Amos stretched out his hand towards the Indian lodges.

"Fetch her down. We'll wait."

"No squaw come to Council. Only men, hunters."

"But this ain't all Injun Council. White men here, an' they ax fer the gal."

When this was communicated to the chief, a scowl passed over his face, and a sharp discussion took place among the Indians. What they said the miners could not tell, but after much bickering Amos lifted up his voice and gave several short calls in the direction of the lodges. Soon a reply was returned, and then down the trail sped Jennie towards the Council ground. As she drew near her steps slackened, for was she not breaking a custom of long standing among her people? Encouraged by Amos, she at length reached the place, and was requested to relate her story.

So intent were the miners upon their task that they scarcely noticed the change which had taken place around them, or how the time was passing. The wind had risen, moaning gently at first, but increasing in strength, blowing in from the Yukon, and drawing up the Kaslo as through a mighty funnel. It shook and swayed the trees along the banks of the stream; it played with the old chief's blanket, causing him to clutch it firmly, and tossed Jennie's long black hair in confusion about her oval, dusky face.

Timidly the maiden stood before the expectant miners, uncertain what to say.

"Speak out, gal," encouraged Pete. "Ye needn't fear. Nothin'll harm ye."

"Hold on!" called out one of the miners. "Wouldn't it be as well for Bill to stand forth so all can see him?"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the men.

But Pritchen shrank back, and glanced around as if seeking some avenue of escape.

"No, ye don't do that, man," said Caribou Sol, interpreting his thoughts. "Not till we're through with ye, at any rate."

Pritchen was in a trap, he fully realized that, and a wild rage mingled with his fear. He reached for his revolver, but it was not there. Anyway it would have been of little use, for instantly a score of revolvers leaped from as many hip pockets, and covered him in the twinkling of an eye.

"Come out here!" roared Pete, "an' stand up like a man. Thar's no use kickin'."

There was nothing else to be done, and sulkily Pritchen stepped forward and faced the Indian girl.

"Thar, that's better. Now go ahead," continued Pete, turning to Jennie.

The latter, however, did not speak, but stood staring at Pritchen, as a bird fascinated by a serpent.

"De' ye know that man?" demanded the prospector, seeing her embarrassment.

"Yes. Me know 'um," came the low reply.

"Whar did ye fust see 'im?"

"Heem bad man; bad heart. Heem keel my modder long tam ago."

"It's a lie!" shouted Pritchen.

"Jennie no lie. Me see 'um."

A movement among the miners was quieted by Pete's next question.

"Gal, did ye see that man put the bags of gold in the missionary's cabin? Tell me that."

"Yes. Me see 'um."

"How did you see 'im do it?"

"Jennie see in windee. Heem look all around. Heem see box. Heem take wan poke, heem take two poke, all same dis," and the girl drew her hand twice from beneath her shawl, and stooped to the ground to show how it had been done.

"You lie!" snarled Pritchen. But it was easy to see from his pallid face that the girl's words were having their effect.

"Jennie no lie!" and the maiden, with fear all gone and an indignant mien, looked unwaveringly into the villain's eyes. "Me tell true. Me Clistin. Me no lie! You laugh at peegee in box. You put down cover lak dat," and she slapped her hands together. "You lock box. You trow key in stove. You laugh, bad, ugh!"

During this disclosure Pritchen had stood with his eyes fixed upon the ground, to all outward appearance abashed and confounded. But such was

not the case. He was thinking hard and fast, while from the corner of his left eye he beheld a sight which filled him with a new determination. He was a desperate man, in a desperate position, and though hope had fled his heart, the spirit of revenge rankled deep. He had played his game and lost, but at any rate he would leave a mark which would be felt.

Scarcely had Jennie finished speaking, when, quick as thought, he leaped towards the pile of rifles lying on the ground, and seizing one turned fiercely upon Old Pete. The rifle was raised, his finger pressed the trigger, and the report rang out. Instead, however, of the ball touching the prospector, it bored its way into the earth, while the rifle flew from Pritchen's grasp, and a dozen hands were laid roughly upon him. He struggled, fought, and tore like a wildcat, but all to no avail. The blood in the miners' veins ran fire. They surged around their victim, overpowered him, and with a leathern belt bound his hands firmly behind his back.

"A rope! A rope!" shouted one. "There, in my cabin you'll find a strong one!"

"That tree!" yelled another. "We'll sling him up!"

Old Pete tried his best to stop them in their mad design. He shouted, pleaded, and even fought to free the captive.

"Drive 'im from Klassan!" he roared, "but don't let his blood be on our heads!"

He might as well have spoken to the wind which was roaring around them. The men were besides themselves, demented. They had reached the limit of their patience, and the wild passions surged within their breasts. In their eyes the cowardly deeds of Pritchen were without parallel. What dastardly tricks! What base, underhanded work! What designs of hell! The rope, and rope only, was the proper punishment!

Half dragged and half stumbling, the wretched man reached the tree, Nature's solid gallows, standing ghost-like and grim in the deepening darkness. He looked wildly around, and tried to free his hands.

"Mercy! For God's sake, mercy!" he cried, as the noose was slipped around his neck. "Let me go! Give me another chance, and I'll leave the country!"

"The rope'll take you to a new country, and a hot one at that, quicker than you can mush," jeered one.

"Mercy! Mercy!" pleaded the wretched man. "Spare me this once! I'll tell you all, and get out!"

"Did ye kill that Injun woman?" asked Pete, stepping near.

"Yes."

"Did ye lave young Radhurst to die in the Ibex cabin, an' stole his gold?"

"Yes."

"An' did ye steal Tim Fleeters' gold an' put it in the mission house?"

"Yes. Yes, I did it all. For God's sake, forgive me! I'm a bad man! O God, help me!"

A yell of rage was the only response to his wild pleadings, for a dozen hands had seized the rope, which had been thrown over one of the large projecting branches.

"All together, pull!" was the shout, and with a terrible, gurgling cry, Pritchen swung from the ground into the air.

And even as the men pulled, dead set upon their fearful deed, there was sweeping down upon their own heads the mighty flood of ice and water. The jam had given way and, sweeping down, was bearing all before it. The excitement of the men and the roaring of the wind up-stream prevented the noise from reaching their ears. Thus, unconscious of destruction to themselves, they were all intent upon their efforts to hurl a comrade into eternity.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LIGHT OF THE CROSS

THE afternoon sun was flooding the whole landscape with the golden glory of a burnished shield as Keith Steadman, the outcast, sat on a mountain ridge looking down upon the village of the fierce Quelchie Indians. His clothes were torn and tattered, his bronzed face and hands scratched and bleeding. Gaunt, footsore and hungry, he presented a forlorn figure, a mere speck on the mountain's brow.

Behind him Klassan lay, two hundred and fifty miles off. For ten days he had been on the trail, along the Kaslo River, then up an unnamed branch, through forests, over valleys and plains, and across a high mountain pass.

Though an outcast, driven from home in disgrace, and the light of her he loved so dearly, no shadow of a doubt crossed his mind concerning the Father's goodness. He pictured his flock, which he had tended with such care, scattered upon the many hills. He saw vice rampant at Klassan, the church

closed, the school unattended, and the Indians exposed to every temptation. Nevertheless, he did not consume his strength in useless whining, or rail at the blow which had fallen. His soul was too large for that. He remembered the command his Master had given to His disciples long ago, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another," and he felt it applied to him. Perhaps they had been too secure and too self-centred at Klassan. For years no storms had come to bend them, no wind of adversity to sift the chaff from the wheat, and no fire of trial to purge the gold from the dross. Now, all had come at once, and was it not for the best? "O Lord," he prayed, "in the sifting and testing process may there be many who will stand the trial, and come forth stronger and purer for the fire of affliction?"

As for himself, he could not doubt the leading of the Divine hand. He had been so much centred in his own flock, wrapped up in their welfare, that he had neglected the sheep in the wilderness, who knew not the name of Christ. He had been, like many an earnest pastor, too parochial, unable to look beyond the bounds of his one field of labour. He had forgotten that, though his work was of great value at Klassan, after all "the field is the world," and that Christ's command was to "go into the village over against you." He imagined that his presence was absolutely necessary in his own circumscribed sphere

of labour, and overlooked the fact that "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

But when he had stood before his accusers and judges on that stormy day in the saloon, and later bade farewell to Caribou Sol at the door of the mission house, a new purpose burned in his soul, which shone forth in his face, so that even his enemies marvelled when they saw the light. It was the Lord's will, he realized that clearly, and as He used evil men in days gone by for the furtherance of His mighty plans, were not these men now to be used as instruments in spreading abroad the Gospel light?

His mind naturally turned toward the Quelchie Indians, the most cruel and savage band in the North, the dread and terror of the whole land. Mothers hushed their children to rest by the one word "Quelchie," and nothing startled a camp more quickly than the mere mention of that dreaded name. To this tribe the message must be carried, and he was the one to go.

Thus, so near the object of his desire, and the end of the long trail, he rested for a while on the mountain's brow, and gazed down upon the village nestling beneath. He could see the smoke curling up from numerous lodges, and occasionally the cry of a child or the sharp bark of a dog fell upon his ears.

He drew forth the little locket, and gazed long and earnestly upon the face within. Through the

time of trial, on the rough trail, and by the lonely camp fire at night, the thought of Constance had been as an inspiration. He longed to see her, to look into her eyes, and listen to her words as she told of her faith in him. He wondered what she was doing, and if she missed him much. He pictured her moving about the cabin, or sitting in her accustomed place by the window. Would he ever see her again? Into the new field ahead were dangers unknown, and what great changes might take place in a short time!

Thinking thus, he moved cautiously down the steep mountain side, where only the bighorn sheep could walk secure. He was on an old Indian trail which would lead him to the village. By that same pass the dreaded Quelchies had filed on various occasions to bring death and destruction to some unsuspecting bands of natives beyond. Now for the first time in the world's history it was being trodden by the weary foot of a messenger of peace.

The Quelchie village lay in a valley, surrounded by frowning mountains, well protected from the fierce northern winds. A small stream flowed hard by, frozen in winter, gently babbling in summer, and flooded in springtime from its own countless tributaries.

The Indians had recently returned from their various hunting grounds, and were enjoying life to the

full in their wild, uncouth way when Keith entered the settlement. A lean, skulking cur gave the alarm, which was taken up by scores of his companions, who rushed upon the stranger, yelping and snarling in the most ferocious manner. From dozens of lodges men, women and children suddenly poured, and, beholding the cause of the disturbance, joined the dogs in their wild clamour. The rifle was wrenched from his hand by a large Indian, who was soon fighting with half a dozen more for the control of the prize. Everything that Keith possessed was stolen; his knapsack, in which he kept a few treasures; the cap was torn from his head, while rough hands laid hold upon the very clothes he wore. He was hustled and pushed first one way and then another. At times he stumbled and fell, though endeavouring to maintain as dignified a mien as possible.

In the confusion his buck-skin shirt was parted at the neck, and the locket exposed to view. Instantly a scramble ensued for the trinket. Then Keith's blood was aroused. They might lay hands upon anything else, but not upon that. Straightening himself up, he drove blow after blow at his dusky assailants with his clenched fist, knocking down two or three, and compelling the rest to fall back a few paces.

Seizing the opportunity which the lull in the storm afforded, he addressed a few words to them in the

Tukudh tongue, which, although somewhat different from their own language, they were able to understand.

"Quelchies!" he shouted, above the din of the yelping dogs, "listen to what I have to say! I have a great message for your chief. Take me to him."

A yell of derision was the only response, and the savages were about to renew the onset when a strong, clear voice was heard commanding them to desist. The effect was magical, and looking around for the speaker, Keith beheld a stalwart Indian of more than ordinary height, with grace of movement and fine, intelligent face, advancing toward him.

In this man he thought he recognized his rescuer, one who had the power to save him from the surging horde.

"Great warrior!" he cried, addressing the stranger, "keep back the Indians! Take me to your chief. I have a message to deliver."

For a time the native maintained a dignified silence, though never for a moment did his eye leave the missionary's face. He seemed to be studying every line and expression of that bronzed countenance. The effect of this close scrutiny Keith could not tell, though he somehow felt that it meant life or death.

"Come," said the Indian at length. "Come with me."

That was all, and without a word Keith followed his deliverer, who strode on before, leaving the rest of the Indians quarrelling over the articles they had filched. He was conducted to a building rather larger than the others, composed entirely of logs. Within, several women were sitting on wolf and bear-skin rugs, who gazed with silent curiosity upon the pale-face stranger.

"Stay here," said the guide, motioning him to a place on one of the rugs. "I will be back soon."

The interior of the lodge was similar to many others Keith had seen, and interested him not. The women, he concluded, were the Indian's wives. He noticed that they were superior in appearance to the ones he had seen outside, and of a pleasing cast of countenance.

One of them was quite young, and good to look upon. Her long black hair parted in the middle exposed a noble forehead. She was busily engaged upon a pair of moccasins, weaving in a delicate pattern of bead-work. Occasionally she shot a glance at the stranger, and then Keith noted how bright were her eyes, while upon her face was an expression of sadness and weariness.

Presently his eye rested upon something which made him start. By the side of the young woman, and fastened to the wall, he beheld a prospector's pick and shovel. How had they come there? Had some poor, unfortunate man ventured into this camp,

been slain by the Quelchies, while only these tools remained to tell the tale? He was about to break the silence, and question the woman, when the Indian returned and motioned him out of the building.

He was at once taken to a large lodge standing somewhat apart, which Keith concluded must belong to the chief. Nor was he mistaken, for he soon found himself in the presence of the aged patriarch of the Quelchie band. Squatting on the floor, surrounded by a motley group of women and children, he presented a weird spectacle. Coarse gray hair flowing down over his shoulders allowed only a portion of his withered, wrinkled face to be exposed to view. His eyes, more like holes in a piece of leather than anything else, peered straight at the visitor.

Keith involuntarily shuddered as he looked upon the pitiable object before him. This, then, was the man of whom he had heard so much. How often he had listened as the Tukudhs related tales of his fierce jealousy, insane rage, and inhuman cruelty, when thwarted by friend or foe. In days gone by he had heard men dilate in glowing terms of the free, beautiful life of the Indians in their wild, uncivilized condition. They had pictured them roaming the woods and mountains, skimming along grassy lakes or gliding down the rapid streams. But of the sterner, sadder side they knew nothing, and how he longed to show those very men the difference between

Klassan, where the light of Christ had come, and this wretched Quelchie village in heathen darkness.

"Oh, Lord," he prayed, "help me, give me power to say the right word and to bring the Spirit into these miserable lives."

Advancing to the old chief, he bowed low, and detecting a faint sign of pleasure upon the dusky face, he felt somewhat encouraged.

"Great Quelchie chief," he began, "I am a stranger in your midst. I have come a long way over a hard trail to bear to you a message from my own Chief, whom I have served from a child. May I speak?"

"The pale-face is welcome," came the reply. "The chief of the Quelchies will listen."

The missionary's heart thrilled with joy at this opportunity to say a word for his Master. He told about the Great Father in heaven, who so loved the world that He sent His only Son to live among men and to die on the cross that all might be saved. He described the cruel lives of the Tukudhs in times past, and what a change had taken place since they became Christians; of their church, school, books they had, the hymns they sang, and the happier lives they led. For a long time he spoke, the Indians listening with rapt attention. He forgot his hunger and weariness and the danger of his position as he pictured the glories of the Christ-life. He glowed

with enthusiasm. His words burned with fire as he simply told

"The old, old story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
Of Jesus and His love."

Then he sang for them a hymn, one loved by his own flock at Klassan. It was a translation of "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and he sang it with a full, rich voice and an intensity of expression.

All this time the stalwart Indian had stood quietly by the chief's side with his gaze fixed full upon the speaker's face. But no sign did he give to show that the words had any effect. When the address was ended, however, he turned to his chief and spoke a few brief words, bearing no connection, so Keith thought, to the burning message he had just delivered.

"The pale-face stranger is hungry," he said. "He has been a long time on the trail, and is weary. I will take him to my lodge."

The chief nodded his approval.

"Take him," he replied. "Give him food, and bring him to me to-morrow."

Once again within his guide's house, Keith was supplied with an abundance of food. Though not of the savouriest, and badly cooked, the meat tasted

delicious after his long fast. Much refreshed, he turned to his host, who was observing him with a kindly expression.

"Tell me," he inquired, "why you are so kind to me. I am a stranger, and of a race hated by your people. Yet you have delivered me from the hands of the Indians, shelter me now in your lodge, and provide me with food. Is this the way you treat an enemy?"

A peculiar smile crossed the Indian's face as he listened to these words.

"I am Shrahegan," he replied, "and is there not a good reason why I should be kind to my pale-face brother?"

"What reason?" asked Keith in surprise.

"Does not my brother remember Shrahegan?"

"Remember you! Why, I never saw you before!"

Again the native smiled as he continued.

"Does not my brother remember eight snows ago when he shot the fierce grizzly in the pass beyond the mountains, and saved the life of an Indian boy?"

"Yes, oh, yes, I remember that day very well," and Keith thought of the fine bear-skin rug in the Radhurst cabin. "But what has that to do with your kindness to me?"

"Shrahegan was that boy," came the startling response, "and Shrahegan never forgets."

"What! you that boy? I can't believe it!" and Keith looked at the Indian in amazement.

"You may not believe it, but it is true. Shrahegan saw you then, and once again at Klassan."

"At Klassan!"

"Yes, at Klassan."

"But what were you doing there?"

"Ah, Shrahegan went as a spy. The Quelchies wished to attack the Tukudhs; kill the men, and steal their women. He crossed the mountain, and crept upon the village at night. He looked through a window into a big building, and heard the Indians sing just like you sang to-day. Then he saw there the man who had saved his life, dressed all in white, talking to the people, though he could not hear what was said. Then Shrahegan crept softly away back to his own people, and told the chief his story."

"And that was why you spared me," said Keith in astonishment.

"Yes. Shrahegan saw there the man who saved the old chief's son, and Shrahegan never forgets a kindness."

"What! are you the chief's son?"

"Yes."

"And what would have happened if I had not saved your life, or if you had not recognized me?"

"You would have been put to death. No pale-face ever entered the Quelchie camp and lived to tell about it."

"So other white men have come here, then, and you cruelly killed them?"

"They came to steal our land, and to find out what you call gold."

"Ah, now I see. That is why you have the prospector's pick and shovel there. You killed the man and kept these."

"Yes, there were two men, but one got away, and the Quelchies could not catch him."

At once there flashed into Keith's mind the story Constance had told him of the prospector who had died in the Vancouver Hospital, and the map he had entrusted to her. He had seen the sketch and it corresponded exactly with this locality. Was it the place, he wondered, where Pritchen and Kenneth had been?

"Tell me," he said, "how many pale-face men have entered this valley and went back again?"

"Only this many," and Shrahegan held up three fingers. "The man I told you about, and two when the geese went South. The Quelchies did not know they were here till too late to catch them."

"Shrahegan," and Keith looked earnestly at the Indian, "will you show me where that gold lies? Will you take me to the place?"

A stern expression came into the native's face, and Keith feared he had gone too far. It was only a fleeting shadow, however, which was instantly dispelled.

"Yes, Shrahegan will take his pale-face brother to

the gold," was the brief reply. "But come, rest now. It is late."

That night as Keith lay wrapped up in a large wolf-skin robe, he thought much of the stirring scenes which had happened during the day. He saw most plainly the guidance of the Father's hand, and His great over-ruling power. "Because the Saviour bore His cross," he said to himself, "endured agony and shame, a great light has sprung up throughout the world. So God grant, that from my cross a light may come forth to lighten this tribe, sunk so long in the weary darkness of superstition and sin."

CHAPTER XXVI

GUARDED

WHILE the old chief, and the Indians about him, were quietly listening to the missionary's message, and drinking in every word, there was one person present who was consumed with a bitter hatred. This was the Medicine Man, who, sitting on the ground, never once took his eyes off the face of the speaker.

Crafty, base, and devoid of any spark of humanity, he was the terror of the whole band. Believing himself to be in league with the unseen powers around him, he exercised over the ignorant and superstitious people all the influence of his fearful craft. An octopus in human guise, he reached out, gripped his victim, and held him in his merciless grasp. His pretensions at curing the sick by wild juggling; his sleight-of-hand work; foretelling of future events, and conjuring in order to drive away evil spirits, were all parts of his method of work.

His greed was beyond description, and he acted according to the price paid. In times of sickness,

women would take their beads to the "doctor's" tent, silently throw them at his feet, and then return. If the amount satisfied the conjuror, he would go to the sick man's side, when incantations took place. If the sick person recovered he would acknowledge all the praise; but, if otherwise, he declared that some rival opposed him, who had been better paid. His jealousy was a constantly burning fire, and woe sooner or later fell upon the man, woman, or child unfortunate enough to incur his anger. So when he beheld a rival in the stranger, the pale-face who boldly told of changes which had taken place at Klassan, where he knew the Medicine Men had been put to confusion, he determined to bestir himself.

For two or three days he watched the effect the new teaching had upon the Quelchies. He listened to the earnest discussions in the various camps, as every detail was carefully considered. He was a silent observer of all that took place, and insinuated himself into any company where he was likely to further his designs. What he learned was sufficient to cause him much unrest, and he realized that some sudden and startling coup was necessary to remove his rival, and to re-establish his own influence.

He hated the old chief for allowing the missionary the freedom of the camp, and he hated the people for listening so readily to the words of a stranger.

Fortune wonderfully favoured him, for on the

very day that Keith and Shrahegan left for the gold-bearing creek the old chief's youngest and most beloved son became seriously ill. The Medicine Man was immediately called to the side of the sufferer, who, dressed in his hideous costume, began at once his strange incantations.

Those in the lodge watched almost breathlessly his wild contortions, anxious to catch any word which might fall from his lips.

"An evil spirit is in the camp," he muttered at length. "It has cast its spell over the chief's son, and he will die. Other children will die, too, unless the spirit is driven out."

A long pause followed this startling announcement, and the listeners bent eagerly forward to catch the name of the one who was causing the trouble.

They were forced to wait for some time, however, before the crafty rogue was ready to satisfy their curiosity. Then "pale-face stranger" fell upon their ears, causing them to look quickly at one another.

The conjurer thrilled with joy as he noticed the effect of his words, and saw the Indians quietly leave the lodge to spread the news to those without. The old spell had still its influence, and he gave a low chuckle of delight.

Knowing nothing of what was taking place at the Quelchie camp, Keith returned with Shrahegan after two days' absence. It was only natural that he

should feel much elated over the success of his visit. He had been more than human if his heart had not beat fast when he looked upon the gold gleaming from the bed rock, exposed to view, along the steep banks of the creek. Here were virgin riches untold, which for ages had been awaiting the coming of the miners.

He glanced around upon the splendid scenery; the long, deep gulches; the banks lined with trees, among which the squirrels scolded, and the early birds warbled. He thought how peaceful it all seemed, with the little brook babbling and sparkling below him.

Then there came to his mind the change which would take place when this vast wealth became generally known; the mad rush of gold seekers; the mushroom mining town, with all its greed and wickedness.

Before leaving the place he staked his claim, and broke off several fine pieces of gold as specimens. For the first time the prospector's fever possessed him, and all the way back to the village he could think of little but his great discovery. This, however, was suddenly dispelled when he entered the camp and beheld the storm which was about to fall upon his head.

"The Indians are much excited," said Shrahegan, who soon found out all about the matter. "I hardly know what to do."

"Where is the sick boy?" asked Keith. "I should like to see him."

"In the chief's lodge. Come, I will take you to him."

The youth was lying upon several rugs on the floor, breathing hard. He was only a stripling, but noted for his rare skill in the chase and endurance on the trail.

The Medicine Man was by his side, holding the conjurer's rattle in his hand. He paused in his hideous, mournful noise when he beheld his hated rival enter the building.

This time the old chief gave no sign of welcome, but sat on the floor with his knees drawn up to his chin, and head bent forward in token of grief.

"Pale-face brought evil upon my boy," he said fiercely, when Shrahegan addressed him. "If he die the stranger must answer for it."

This Keith well knew, and unless something was done at once, not even Shrahegan's protection could save him from the angry Indians incited by the conjurer.

"Great chief," he said, advancing to the bowed figure, "cannot the Medicine Man cure your son?"

"No," came the fierce response.

"Does he say he will die?"

"Yes, he will die."

"Well, then, great chief, will you let me examine

the youth," I am a doctor, too, and perhaps I can do something to help your son."

Before an answer could be given, the Medicine Man leaped before the missionary and in wild rage gave vent to his fury. He danced, screamed, and denounced the pale-face stranger in the most violent terms.

For a time this was permitted, and then into Shrahegan's face came a look of determination. With one grip of his powerful hand he seized the conjurer by the arm, shook him like a rat, and sent him tumbling out of the lodge.

The Indians within the room looked aghast at such a move, and half expected the house to collapse, or something terrible to happen. It was a thing unknown for any one to meddle with the "doctor," and of this Shrahegan was well aware. But it seemed to disturb him not in the least. He turned quietly to the missionary.

"Examine the sick boy," he said. "Shrahegan gives you permission to look at his brother."

"Is it the will of the great chief of the Quelchies?" asked Keith, turning towards the old man.

Receiving only a nod in reply, he at once stepped to the side of the prostrate lad, and made a careful examination of his condition.

"He is very sick," he quietly remarked.

"What is the matter?" asked Shrahegan anxiously.

"A high fever."

"Not an evil spirit?"

"The only evil spirit," continued Keith, "is the one who has increased the fever by vile medicine and terrible noise."

"What, the Medicine Man?"

"Yes. He soon would have made an end of your brother."

A fierce look came into Shrahegan's face, and he made a move as if to leave the building. Keith laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"Stay," he said. "Don't do anything rash. I want your help. We must remove the lad to a quiet lodge, and I shall try to undo the harm which has been done. It is the only way to save his life."

Shrahegan looked intently into the missionary's face, as if to fathom the depth and strength of his mind.

"Does my pale-face brother know?" he asked, "the risk he is running? Does he know that the wrath of the Medicine Man is upon him? that the Indians are very angry, and, if the boy die, the pale-face will die too?"

"I know it all," replied Keith. "I am not afraid of the Medicine Man. There stands with me One greater than he, who will help me. He is my Master, my Great Chief, Jesus, whom I serve."

"And the pale-face is not afraid?" repeated Shrahegan in surprise.

"Why should I be afraid? What good will it do? It will not cure your brother, and I know Shrahegan will help me."

"Shrahegan will help; he will do all he can. But remember, the Indians are much excited, and, if the boy die, Shrahegan can do but little to help his pale-face brother."

"And if the boy gets better?" queried Keith, "what will your people think?"

"Pale-face will be safe," came the evasive reply.

"Good. Now we must get busy."

By this time the condition of the sick lad was very serious, and Keith knew that whatever was done had to be done quickly and wisely. Therefore as soon as the youth was removed to another lodge, he brought forth his little medical companion, which Shrahegan had rescued from the Indians, made a careful selection, and rapidly prepared the medicine which he thought best to administer.

But before laying a hand upon the patient he fell upon his knees and poured out his soul to the Giver of Life for help and strength in the time of trial.

Then the fight began, a fight not only for the life of one person, but for the souls of all those around him, sunk in the darkness of vice and superstition.

For hours he stayed by the side of the sufferer, Shrahegan only keeping watch with him. Seldom they spoke, and then only in a whisper. The day and the night passed, but still Keith remained at his

post, much of the time on his knees. Shrahegan brought him food, but he ate very little, there was too much at stake to think of bodily wants.

Throughout the camp the smouldering fire of excitement was intense, ready to burst forth at any instant. During the day perpetual watch was kept upon the little lodge, and at night anxious ears were strained to catch the faintest sound. The old chief remained in his own house, silent and bowed with grief. His wives sat almost motionless by his side, not daring to address their imperious master. The Medicine Man prowled like a wolf from place to place, the very incarnation of jealousy, fear and rage.

On the morning of the third day Shrahegan emerged from the silent lodge. He was surrounded by an eager, persistent crowd of natives, who demanded information concerning the patient. To these he said nothing, but going at once to the old chief, led the feeble, tottering man to his son's side. Keith, weary and haggard, arose as the two entered. He saw the look of surprise and delight upon the chief's face, when he beheld his son lying before him on the road to recovery.

"Great chief," said Keith, "see, your son is better. Soon he will walk again."

"Is the evil spirit gone?" came the eager query.

"All gone. You have nothing to fear."

"Was the Medicine Man here? Did he help?"

"No," replied Shrahegan contemptuously. "He would have killed the boy, and now he is outside, raging in his fury and jealousy. This is the Medicine Man," and he pointed to Keith, "the doctor who has done the good work."

"Give not the credit to me," answered the missionary, "but to the Great Medicine Man, the Doctor of souls, Jesus, my Master. He has wrought this cure. I had but little to do with it."

Saying this, he moved wearily from the lodge, to seek food and rest, leaving the feeble chief and the noble Shrahegan alone with the patient.

CHAPTER XXVII

GUIDED

WHEN Keith stood before Shrahegan's lodge, the second day after the recovery of the sick youth, the spirit of conquest for Christ's sake possessed his entire being. Once it was only Klassan; then the village over against him; now, the whole northland, with its numerous tribes of the wandering foot.

Then the thought of his helplessness swept upon him. What was he to do? Only one man to carry on the great work. He must have help, men to man the field. If the miners at Klassan would not endure him, some one else must be stationed there, while he worked among the Quelchies, or in some other place. Two or three men he must have, and that as soon as possible. To write for them would take too long, with the uncertainty of their coming. No, that plan would not do; he must go himself.

He, therefore, determined to return to Klassan. The Indians would protect him while there, and when the ice ran out of the Yukon, either to drift down

to St. Michael in an open boat, or await the arrival of the first steamer. He would go to Eastern Canada, lay the matter before the Mission Board, and appeal for help. Then, if the men could not be supplied, he would go from place to place, searching, ever searching, till he obtained the ones he required. He would have able men or none at all, he was set upon that.

He was aware of the feeling which prevails in the minds of some that anyone will do for the mission field. But he knew from long experience that on the frontier—the ragged edge of civilization—where life is wild and strenuous, only strong men could succeed; men sound in limb, keen in intellect, and thoroughly consecrated to the Master's cause.

Next, the money question confronted him. Suppose he got the right men, where would he obtain the necessary funds for their maintenance? It meant a big expense to provide passages for three or four men, and support them in a land where living was so dear. The Missionary Society, he knew, was able to do but little, and this would be the strongest barrier to his plan. He might appeal for help in the various towns and cities, but such aid would only be ephemeral. What was he to do?

In his perplexity he began to pace up and down before the lodge, and unconsciously thrust his hands into the pockets of his buck-skin jacket, as was his wont when in troubled thought. As he did so he

touched the nuggets of gold which had lain there since his return from the rich creek. He drew them forth, gazed upon them, and at once a light clear and strong burst full upon his mind. For a while he seemed dazed by the immensity of the idea, and he stood looking upon the shining specimens in his hand, thinking it must be nothing but a dream.

"It is God's doing," he said to himself. "He never places his servants in a great battle without providing weapons for the conflict. I doubted about the money, the means to carry on the work, and here it is at hand, gold in abundance. And why should it not be used for the furtherance of the Kingdom? It is virgin gold, untainted by the touch of greedy men. If it is considered right to use the money which flows into the mission exchequer from many doubtful sources, why should not this be used? Why should missionaries who are in the field hesitate to stake their claims when a new mine is discovered, and use the gold to carry on their work? It has not been done in the past. They have stood aside, watched the crowd arrive, who wallowed in the wealth, erected saloons to further their evil designs, and work havoc among the natives of the land. Then, after watching this, the missionaries have begged the crumbs which fell from these rich men's vile tables to combat the very evil they had introduced. Why should Satan's minions be provided with fine saloons and dance-halls in a new mining

camp, while Christ's ambassadors must use a miserable tent or log shack? No, no! it must not be so here! I will bring in honest men to stake their claims as I have done. We will use the gold to erect a temple to God, a hospital, a fine recreation room, library, and other things for the welfare of the place. Then if the saloons do come, and the baser element, we will be prepared to contest the ground inch by inch, and fight a glorious battle for the right.

"And aside from the work for the white men, why should not this gold be used for the uplifting of the natives? The land is theirs, and in a sense the gold is theirs, and how much better to use it for their own good than to beg it from those unwilling to contribute?"

When Keith was once fairly settled upon any line of action it was not his nature to delay long the doing of it. He thought of the Quelchies he would leave behind for a while, and this caused him a certain degree of sorrow. He had become attached to these uncouth natives during his short sojourn among them. The little children, sturdy and bright, were much in need of a teacher, while the older ones had listened earnestly to his message.

After his successful victory over the Medicine Man the old friendly feeling returned, and though the conjurer's wrath burned fiercely, he did not dare to oppose the missionary any longer. He had ob-

served no change in the Indians' manner of living. There had been no outward sign of acceptance of the truths he had taught. But in this he was not surprised. He had planted the seed into their hearts and minds, and was content to leave the increase to the Master of Life.

When the time came for him to say farewell the old chief reached out his thin, scrawny hand.

"Pale-face come again soon, eh?"

"Yes, as soon as I can," replied Keith. "Will the great chief give me welcome?"

"The chief of the Quelchies will welcome the brave pale-face teacher. Come again soon."

"God helping me, I will."

"Ah, good," and the old man's wrinkled face broke into a weary smile.

For some distance on the trail Keith was accompanied by Shrahegan. This noble Indian seemed so different from the rest of his people that the missionary often longed to question him concerning the reason.

"Shrahegan," he said, as they moved on their way, "you told me once the cause of your kindness to me, but why are you different from your people? You are much nobler, have deeper thoughts, and are opposed to the Medicine Man."

The Indian paused and looked earnestly into his companion's face. An eager look shone in his eye as he slowly replied.

"Shrahegan has a strange fire here," and he placed his right hand upon his breast. "Once a black bear, wolf and fox all lived here, but now they have gone, and only the fire burns all the time."

"What fire?" questioned Keith, looking wonderingly at the fine figure before him.

In reply, Shrahegan stretched out his arm and pointed toward the East, where the grand peaks of the Rocky Mountains, snow-capped and sun-crowned, were standing out clear and distinct.

"There," he said, "beyond the mountains, the land of the rising sun, where the great river flows to the home of the lights which dance in the heavens—there the fire began to burn."

"What, the Mackenzie River District?"

"Ah, ah. Shrahegan saw much there, and learned many things. He saw the big canoe, breathing smoke as black as night, flying up the river, and heard men tell of the wonderful things in the land of the pale-face. Ah, Shrahegan found much."

"And you long to see the strange things?" asked Keith.

"Ah, the fire has been here ever since. Shrahegan thinks much. His feet walk in the ways of the Quelchies, but his heart is over there. And what have my people done?" he continued almost fiercely. "They make no change; they know nothing. They live like the moose, the bear, the wolf, and the fox. They eat, sleep, talk, fight, and die, but do nothing.

As we are to-day, our fathers were the same before us, and so will our children be. And what has the Medicine Man done? Nothing. He says he knows much, but he is wrong. Shrahegan feels the fire. He hears a strange voice which gives him no rest."

It was truly a marvellous spectacle to see this giant savage, travailing in the throes of a new birth. It reminded Keith of a picture which often came to his mind, of the beginning of civilization among his own rude ancestors. All around was a dreary land, wind-swept and cold, over which men, women and children were crawling, fighting and dying. In the midst of this pathetic scene one man had lifted his head and was listening as if to a voice from the far-off sea, while in his dull, stupid eye the gleam of a new light could be dimly discerned. The light of God was breaking, which at last burst forth into such marvellous glory.

"Shrahegan," said Keith, when the Indian had finished, and stood looking away toward the East, "what do you want? What will give you rest?"

"To see. To know," came the slow, thoughtful reply.

"For yourself only?"

"No, no! For my people, too. Shrahegan wants them to have the fire, and to see other things."

"And do you want a teacher?"

"Ah, Shrahegan wants the pale-face teacher to live among his people, to help them. And will he

come?" he questioned, looking deep into the missionary's eyes.

"Yes, he will come, or send another better," came the reply. "And while he is away Shrahegan will not forget?"

"Shrahegan will not forget. How can he when he has seen the light and felt the fire?"

When once alone, Keith's steps quickened. The King's business required haste and he must not delay. After crossing the mountain he reached the unnamed river flowing free and strong before him. Here was an opportunity which a frontiersman could not afford to overlook. The stream would speed him on his way to Klassan.

With some difficulty he fashioned a small raft from the dead, broken trees on the bank, and entrusting himself to this with a prayer for guidance, was soon sweeping down with the current.

Day after day he moved onward, past islands, bars, and jutting points, guiding the craft by means of a long, stout pole by many a dangerous place. Just when he expected that one day more would bring him to Klassan, he found that the speed of the current was decreasing to a considerable extent. Then he was surprised to find the ice drifting slowly in various places. The farther he advanced the slower became his progress, until at length he found the river entirely blocked with the floating mass. There was nothing to do but to abandon the craft

which had done him such good service, and travel on foot along an Indian trail which wound its devious way through the wilderness.

He had hoped to reach Klassan early in the afternoon, but in this he was disappointed, and night had shut down when at last he paused to rest atop the hill looking down upon the village.

It was not for rest alone that he halted and seated himself upon a jutting rock. It was to collect his thoughts, which were in a perturbed condition. How would he be received at Klassan? he wondered, and what had happened since his departure? Then he was so near to her. What was she doing down there in the darkness? Moving, perhaps, about the little cabin. Was she thinking of him, the wanderer, the outcast, with the stain upon his name? He shivered, not from apprehension alone, but from the chill, mist-laden wind rolling and roaring up the valley.

He rose to his feet and advanced a few paces, when a strange sound away to the right startled him and stayed his steps. He peered ahead through the darkness. He strained his ears and listened like a hunted creature. Presently the truth flashed upon him, terrible, intense. It was the ice-jam! It had given way and was sweeping down with irresistible force upon the village below! Would the miners know of it? Would they flee to the high banks? And what of her? Was she safe?

He threw aside his rifle and leaped forward like

a greyhound. Down, down, through the darkness he sped, over rocks, beating the bushes aside, falling and stumbling, but ever on, with clothes torn, hands and face scratched and bleeding. He heeded not the wounds, he never felt them, for the awful roar of the onrushing waters was in his ears. Would he never reach the place! How the trail had lengthened, and the obstacles, how many there were! What was that? Ah, a cabin. Thank God, she was safe! He reached the door. He stumbled. He fell. He regained his feet. He beat upon the wood with his hands. He saw a light, felt a warm rush of air, and heard a cry of astonishment.

"Run, run!" he shouted. "The water! It's coming! The jam has burst! For God's sake, save yourselves!"

That was all, all he had time for, then out into the night, and down the trail straight to the miners' cabins. He reached the forks of the road. He sped past, and then suddenly stopped. A cry, a noise, fell upon his ears. There, yes, to the right. He rushed on. He saw dim forms of people, and into their midst he sprang like a wildcat after its prey.

He hardly knew what he said. He comprehended not the meaning of what they were doing. He only heard a yell of fright as a wild, hurried scramble for the high banks ensued, while something fell with a dull thud almost at his very feet.

He was about to follow the miners and Indians in

their flight, when a groan arrested his steps. He looked down. It was a man, helpless and bound. What did it mean? What was that crowd doing there in the darkness? The thoughts surged like lightning through his brain. He reeled and almost fell. But the roar above nerved him. He called for help, but only the waters sent back their terrible response. Desperate, determined, he seized the prostrate man in his arms and staggered with him toward the bank. Would he reach it? Would his strength hold out? Yes. No. O God, help him! for the cruel waters had reached him! They thrust out their long, icy tongues, they swept him off his feet and hurled him forward, still grasping in his arms the body of the helpless man.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SHADOWED GLEN

THE night the jam gave way Constance was seated by the table engaged upon a piece of needlework. The candle by her side threw its feeble, flickering beams upon her dark hair and well-formed face. The rich tide of health was not flowing as of old, free and strong. It had fled from her cheeks, leaving them at times very white. Occasionally her busy fingers ceased and her work lay unheeded in her lap, while a far-away look stole into her dark brown eyes. The wind beat against the little window and shook the loose panes of glass; it whirled around the cabin, and rattled the rudely constructed stove pipe. Constance shivered, but not from the cold, and often unconscious sighs escaped her lips.

Her father was sitting near, reading, or pretending to read, a book Keith had loaned him. It was one of the few volumes left of the missionary's carefully chosen library. The rest had gone up in smoke. It exemplified the truth that what we keep we lose; what we give we have. Mr. Radhurst was

much improved. The haggard look had left his face; his eyes were clear and his step strong and decisive as of old. Occasionally his gaze wandered from the page he was reading to his daughter's face. He was uneasy about her of late, and noted with apprehension the paleness of her cheeks and the absence of her cheery songs.

"Connie," he kindly said, laying aside the book, "I'm afraid this life is not agreeing with you."

"Why, father dear," she smilingly replied. "Do you think I look very sick?"

"You look far from well, my child, and you need a decided change. This is no place for a woman. You have no companion, no place to visit, nothing but the same dreary routine from morning till night, week in and week out. Then this commotion among the miners and your adventure with that rascally Pritchen are telling upon you, I can see that."

"Yes, father, I am uneasy about the miners, I must admit. We saw them with all those Indians this afternoon, but have heard nothing. Every one seems to have forsaken us."

"Connie," and Mr. Radhurst's voice was low, "I think we had better leave the North. It is no place for us. We are not accustomed to the hardships, and I am too old. It was a great mistake I made, but the fever ran in my veins, and my eyes were blinded. Now I see differently, and think it best to go back."

Had Mr. Radhurst uttered these words several months before Constance would have been filled with delight. But now they brought little joy to her heart. She had changed much. Her old life, with all its associations, was fading, and the North was gripping her hard, as it does so many sooner or later who enter its portals. Chains had been forged which were binding her to the land, chains of hardships, sorrow, and, not the least, love. She had lost a dear and only brother here, but she had gained much in compensation. Life had become more real since Keith Steadman had crossed her path and infused into her heart and mind the longing for higher and nobler things. She compared him with many she had met in days gone by, and how superior he appeared. They were living so much for self, with their little rounds of business, pleasure and small talk. He was living for others, not a common life, but one filled with thought and activity, an unconscious hero in a stern, dreary field. Go back! back to what? That was the question which surged through her mind, causing her long lashes to droop, and her head to bend over her work, till the rich abundance of her hair almost hid her face.

Her father, noticing her embarrassment, wondered. He felt there was some reason for her bent head and unusual silence, but with fatherly solicitude forebore to question her farther.

A peculiar noise outside startled them.

"What's that?" exclaimed Constance.

"The wind," replied her father, "or else a prowling dog."

When, however, the pounding upon the door began both sprang to their feet, and with fast-beating hearts crossed the room. Then when the door was opened and Keith, weary, ragged and blood-stained, staggered into the building, they stared in amazement. They listened speechlessly to his brief message, gasped forth in quick, short syllables, and before they had recovered from their astonishment he was gone.

Constance was the first to realize the situation.

"Quick, father!" she cried, reaching for her cloak and hood. "We must leave the cabin! The flood is coming! Hurry!"

"But I don't think it will reach us, Connie. We are too high up. But what about the miners?"

By this time Constance was out of the house, listening to the dull, ominous roar, sounding down through the darkness. She shivered and drew the cloak more closely around her shoulders. How weird it all seemed! Oh, if the night would only pass and give the blessed daylight!

"Connie," said her father, who had joined her, "I think we had better cross to the higher ground by the Indian encampment. We must not run any risk, and, besides, we may learn how the miners are faring."

Together they made their way through the night, along the rough trail, and after much stumbling reached the Indian village. Here they paused and listened. No light was to be seen, and no human voice could they hear. The camp was deserted.

"Let us go farther," suggested Mr. Radhurst. "We may find out something lower down."

Through the midst of the lodges they moved for several hundred yards along the high bank of the Kaslo. The waters were now surging tumultuously on their left. They could hear the ice groaning and tearing in its onward sweep, but could see nothing. When the last house had been reached they stood straining their eyes in an effort to pierce the darkness.

"What's that?" cried Constance, grasping her father's arm more firmly.

"I heard nothing but the waters," was the reply.

"But I did, father, and it sounded like a shout far ahead. Oh, let us go on along the bank! I am afraid something terrible has happened!"

They had groped their way but a short distance when a light fell upon their eyes. Small at first, it soon grew larger, and then they knew it was a watch-fire upon the shores. Forms of men were seen flitting here and there, gathering sticks to throw upon the flames, which ere long developed into a magnificent blaze. Guided by this they soon reached the spot, and great was the miners' surprise to be-

hold the gray-haired man and the hooded maiden emerge from the darkness.

"What's wrong?" inquired Mr. Radhurst, looking from one to another.

"Wrong?" replied a husky fellow, who had just deposited an armful of wood, "everything's wrong to-night! Flood and death, that's what's wrong!"

Constance's face paled as she listened to these words.

"Why," she gasped, "didn't all escape?"

"Naw. The best has gone down, the only men of the whole gang."

"Who? Oh, tell me quick!"

"Old Pete an' the parson."

The words smote Constance like a sudden blow. Pale at the first intimation of the disaster, she was like death now. She tried to speak, but could utter not a sound.

"Don't be frightened, Miss," said the man not unkindly, noticing her excitement. "It may not be as bad as we think."

"Oh, tell me!" she gasped, "what has happened?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Miss, we don't know much ourselves. You see we were at that devilish job when the parson landed upon us with a yell which made our blood run cold. Then there was a scramble for the high bank, and I guess the Injuns are scramblin' yet, for they haven't shown up since. It was Pete who first shouted out for the parson,

and when he could not be found I thought the old man would go mad. He made for the river with one bound, and the last we heard of him was his cry, "I'm comin', laddie!" and then the flood was upon them."

"But didn't anyone go to their rescue?" asked Constance excitedly. "Did the men all stand by and let them drown?"

"Not a bit of it, Miss. Most of the men are down yon searchin' the shore, but it's so dark I'm afraid they can do very little. We've made this fire to guide them back, and if they do find the poor chaps, a little heat won't be amiss, I reckon."

"Oh, what can we do!" and Constance wrung her hands in agony of mind.

"Wait, Connie. We can wait," replied her father.

"Wait! Wait, and——" A thought flashed through her mind. It was like a still, small voice.

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble," it said.

Yes, why had she forgotten? It made her feel that a Presence was very near, and that He who long ago had delivered His people from the waters of Egypt would hear her now.

"Father," she said quietly, "we can wait, and we can do something more, we can pray."

"Yes, Connie, we can do that."

"And will you pray, father?"

"You do it, dear, for you know better what to say."

A slight flush came into her face as she knelt upon the ground before the fire. She knew the men were watching her, but she did not mind, for what were they to the ones now in peril?

"Oh God," she prayed, "lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, for the love of Thine only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

"Amen. Amen. Amen," came from the miners, who with bowed and uncovered heads were standing reverently around her.

That was all she could utter. When she rose from her knees the men were bestirring themselves. Some had gone for more wood, while others were poking the fire. This latter work was unnecessary, but the men had to do something. The pathetic sight of the beautiful woman kneeling on the ground, offering up that fervent prayer, had touched their hearts, and more than one brushed their sleeves across their eyes when safe under the friendly cover of darkness.

The wood-gatherers had been gone but a short time when they came hurrying back much excited.

"They're coming! They're coming!" shouted one, "and I believe they've found them!"

The report was true, for soon a band of men slowly approached, bearing something between them.

Constance stepped quickly forward and scanned the faces of the men, and, oh joy! there before her stood Keith, with water dripping from his clothes,

his wet hair streaming over his forehead and his face white and haggard.

He did not look upon the men, nor did he see the eager woman gazing so longingly upon him. He beheld only the prostrate form of Pete Martin lying by the fire. Intense agony was expressed in every line of his face as he stooped down and examined the unconscious man.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" he murmured, as he found the prospector's pulse still beating. "We must get him somewhere out of this," he continued, turning to the men. "He is alive and we may do something for him yet."

"Bring him to our cabin, Mr. Steadman," said Mr. Radhurst. "We will care for him."

"Thank you," and Keith turned towards the old man. Then his eye rested upon Constance's animated face, standing by her father's side. It was like a ray of sunshine to his clouded heart, a light in the darkness, peace in the midst of storm, and a faint smile crossed his face—the first in many days.

Tender hands bore Old Pete over the trail to the Radhurst cabin and laid him upon the couch within. Outside, the miners stood in little groups waiting, but hardly knowing what they were waiting for. Homeless, penniless were they, but they never thought of it then. Their own losses were swallowed up in the excitement of the moment, and the sudden blow which had fallen.

Down below, the river—the river of death—surged and moaned. It had swept away the cabins and had gripped in its icy grasp the body of one wretched man, whose hand no more would be raised to strike at the Standard of the Lord and His co-workers.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SHINING TRAIL

WHEN morning dawned it was a dreary sight which met the eyes of the tired watchers gathered about the smouldering embers of the fire upon the high bank. The waters had subsided, leaving masses of ice, trees, rocks and mud strewn around in every direction. Of the miners' cabins nothing remained; they had been swept out into the river.

Looking down upon the scene of desolation, the men realized the helplessness of their position; without cabins, food or blankets matters seemed serious enough. Most of them said nothing, but sat or stood watching the river flowing sullenly by. A few, however, broke into loud complaints. Of these Perdue, the saloon-keeper, was the most incessant in his lamentations.

"Only think," he wailed, "I've lost everything, saved nothing. My supplies and money are all gone."

"An' yer pizened whiskey, why don't ye say," replied Caribou Sol, turning fiercely upon him.

"What are ye howlin' fer, anyway? Why can't ye stan' up an' take yer dose like a man, instid of whinin' like a baby?"

"Chuck him into the river, Sol," called out one of the men. "That will cool him off."

"No, I'll not soil me hands with the likes of 'im; I've other things to do," and Sol turned on his heel and started for the Indian camp.

He had almost reached the place when he saw the missionary emerging from the old chief's lodge, and with him was Amos, the catechist.

"Good morning, Mr. Burke," said Keith, extending his hand. "I'm afraid you have had a bad night of it."

"None the best, sir," came the reply. "But, say, how's Pete?"

"Bad, very bad," and a pained expression came into Keith's face.

"Any chance of gittin' better, de'ye think?"

"I'm afraid not. He is wounded internally. He was badly jammed by the ice."

"An' how did you come through without gittin' pinched?"

"I cannot tell. It was all like a terrible dream. The water swept me off my feet, and when I thought it was all up with me, Pete seized me in his strong arms. A block of ice caught us and drove us to the shore, crushing Pete as it did so. Oh, it was fearful! We were face to face with death."

"An' Bill went down?"

"That was Pritchen, was it?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing to him?"

"Stretchin' his neck."

"I thought so. Did he confess?"

"Yes, coughed up everything."

"Poor chap!"

"It sarved 'im right. He was a bad egg."

"But he was not always bad."

"Ye don't say so! What changed 'im into sich a divil?"

"Drink, gambling and evil companions."

"It seems, sir, that ye knowed 'im afore he struck the North."

"Know him! I should say I did know him! He was my only sister's husband. Oh, Nellie, Nellie! How can I ever tell you all! But how about the men?" he suddenly asked, wishing to change the subject, which was becoming most painful.

"What, the b'ys down yon?"

"Yes."

"In a bad way. Nothin' left."

"And they've no food?"

"Not a scrap."

"Well, look here, Mr. Burke. There's the school room which the men can use until they get new cabins built. They will have to do their cooking outside, but there is a stove in the place which will

keep them warm at night. I have just seen the old chief, and the Indians will loan what blankets they can spare until the steamer arrives."

Sol's eyes opened wide with amazement. "De'ye mean it?" he asked. "I know ye'ud do what ye could to help us out, but I didn't think them Injuns 'ud ever fergit what was done to 'em."

"Yes, I mean every word I say. And what's more, the Indians are willing to give what food they can to the miners. They have a fair supply of dried fish and moose-meat, which will help some."

In reply Sol stretched out a huge hand. "Put it thar!" he said, and tears stood in his eyes. "I can't say any more, but I'll tell the b'ys, an' they'll thank ye."

When Keith returned to the Radhurst cabin he met Constance just outside the door.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come back!" she said. "Pete is awake and calling for you."

"How long did he sleep?" questioned Keith.

"Only a short time after you left. I am afraid he is failing fast."

A faint smile passed over the old man's face as they entered the room where he was lying. It was Constance's room, which she had gladly given up to the patient.

"Laddie, laddie!" he said. "I'm so glad to see ye. I knowed ye'd come back."

"How are you feeling now, Pete?" asked Keith,

as he grasped the hand which was extended in welcome.

"Not very well. I've a bad pain in my chist, but I'm a-thinkin' it'll go away soon."

"We will do all we can to help you, Pete, never forget that."

"I don't mean that, laddie, fer an army of doctors couldn't help me now. I guess it's only the good Lord who will give me any relief."

"Pete, Pete, don't say that!" cried Constance. "We can't spare you yet. What will we do without you?"

"It's the good Lord's will, lassie, an' though I'd like to stay wid yez a while longer, still when He calls I must be a-goin'. An' yit I wonner," he continued after a pause, "what He wants the likes of me up yon fer anyway."

"He wants you, perhaps," replied Keith softly, "for the same reason that we want you here, because He loves you."

"Loves me! Loves me! What is thar in me to love? an' what have I ever done that He should love me?"

" 'I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat,' " quoted Constance, " 'I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in.' That is what you did to us at Siwash Creek, and I am sure Christ won't forget that."

"Oh, that's nothin', lassie. I jist done it 'cause I couldn't see yez suffer, that's all."

"I think it very much. And didn't Christ say that a cup of cold water given in His name will not lose its reward?"

"'In His name!' Ah, lassie, that's jist whar the stick comes. I didn't think much about 'Im when I was a-doin' them things. Thar wasn't the burnin' love in my heart for 'Im that I should have had, an' it's never been very strong in my heart at any time."

"I think the Master will judge differently," said Keith. "Did He not say, 'That greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends?' Isn't that what you did for me last night?"

"Did He say them words, laddie; are ye sure?" and the old man looked his eagnerness.

"Yes, that's just what He said. I will read them to you," and Keith opened his Bible and read the beautiful scene, recorded by St. John, of the true vine and the branches.

For a while Pete remained very still, with his eyes closed, to all appearance asleep.

"Laddie," he suddenly remarked, "them words are very comfortin', but thar 're others which make me feel bad in that same good Book."

"What! in here?"

"Yes, whar the Master tells us about the journey

food. I don't recollect the exact words, but He says if we don't eat His flesh and drink His blood we have no life in us. Now, them are purty straight words, an' I've often thought about 'em. I took the Communion once, jist after my Confirmation, an' a most solemn an' elevatin' sarvice it was. But I ain't took it since. I ain't been worthy."

"But you shall have it now if you wish," said Keith eagerly.

"But de'ye think I'm worthy, laddie?"

"That's not the question, Pete. I doubt if any of us are really worthy of the blessings we receive, and if we waited until we were worthy to follow His command about the Communion we would never take it at all. If we waited until we were well before obeying the doctor's orders, what good would they do? Now, Christ is the Doctor of souls, the Great Physician, and He has given us this blessed food to strengthen, comfort, and to give us more and fuller life. What He wants to see in us is an earnest desire, a true, living faith."

"I do want it, laddie," said Pete eagerly. "It is His command, an' He said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me,' didn't He? I ain't fergot them words, an' when I meet 'Im up yon, mebbe He'll ax me about it, an' what kin I say if I haven't obeyed 'Im. So if ye don't mind, an' it ain't too much trouble, mebbe ye'd give it to me now."

It did not take Keith long to bring the Commun-

ion vessels from the church, and when the fair linen cloth had been spread upon the little table, the bread and wine made ready in the small silver chalice and paten, and the missionary robed in his white surplice and stole, the short, beautiful service began.

Pete followed earnestly every word, and at times a low "Amen" escaped his lips.

"Lassie," he said, turning to Constance when the benediction had been given, won't ye sing a leetle?"

"Yes," came the reply, "what would you like?"

"Thar's a hymn me mother uster sing very often, an' it's mighty fine. It begins this way, 'Jeeroosalem, the golden.' I've sung it meself out on the hills."

"I know it," replied Constance, and in a low, sweet voice she sang the familiar words with eyes filled with tears.

"Go on, lassie, don't stop," said Pete, when the first verse was ended.

Verse after verse was accordingly sung, and when at last the amen fell from her lips, she glanced at the old man and found that he had fallen asleep.

"It is well," said Keith gently. "We will leave him now for a time."

When Pete again awoke the day was far spent, and the sun was swinging low in the west. He opened his eyes, and looked around in a dazed manner, when, meeting Constance's anxious eyes fixed upon him, a smile flitted across his face.

"I had a wonnerful dream, lassie. I saw me father an' mother very plain. They was a-holdin' out their hands to me, jist like they uster do when I was a leetle lad. They looked so happy, an' they was a-smilin' at me. All around them thar was flowers, an' beautiful trees, in which the birds were a-singin'. A leetle brook flowed right by, an' I could hear it ripplin' an' makin' music, like the leetle stream which ran through the medder near my old home. I heard children a-playin' an' laughin' by the brook, an' among the flowers. Oh, it was wonnerful! When I tried to go somethin' held me back. I struggled so hard that at last I woke, an' it all went away."

Again he fell into a sleep, not a peaceful one as before, but troubled. He tossed much, and often unintelligible words escaped his lips. When he next awoke Constance and Keith were sitting near, watching him attentively. He did not notice them, however, for he was off on the trail, following up the golden lure.

"Alec, man," he said, "are ye thar? It's gittin' dark, an' the trail's rough. Lower this pack from me back, man; it's too heavy, I can't stan' it. Whar's me blanket, Alec? It's cold to-night. Throw some sticks on the fire. Thar, that's better . . . We ain't got much further to go, Alec; jist across yon range, down the valley, an' up t'other side . . . Ah, thar's the gold! I knowed it was thar! I've been a-follerin' it all me life . . . Look, man, see how

it shines! Gold! Gold! Thank God, I've struck it at last!"

He looked around the room, and his eyes fell upon the anxious watchers.

"Whar am I, lad?" he asked. "I thought I was on the trail an' had made a rich strike."

"You are here, safe in this cabin," replied Keith, "so don't worry."

"What's the time, laddie?"

"Almost midnight."

"Ah, I didn't think it was so late. But I know it can't be long now, fer I'm slippin' away fast."

Then he looked at Constance and noticed the tears in her eyes.

"Don't cry, lassie. I'm only an old man, an' ain't wuth the fuss."

He was soon away again, this time a child, back in his old home.

"Mother, are ye thar? Bring the light, mother, an' hold me hand while I say me prayers."

He fumbled over the blanket, as if expecting the loving pressure as of old. At once Constance bent over him and took his cold, rough hand in her own. He grasped it firmly, while a look of contentment stole into his face.

"Now, kiss me, mother. I'm very tired, an' want to go to sleep."

Gently as a mother Constance stooped low, and as

her lips touched his bronzed forehead he started suddenly up.

"The trail! The shinin' trail!" he cried. "How bright it is! an' . . . oh, I see . . ."

The little clock in the room struck midnight, and the watchers looked at each other in silence.

"It's all over," said Constance, gently withdrawing her hand. "The long trail is ended."

"And thank God," Keith replied, "that it's of no earthly mine the gold he's struck to-night."

CHAPTER XXX

THE CONSECRATION

"THE ice is going! The ice is going!" The cry rang through Klassan late one afternoon, and produced a magical effect. Men dropped their frying-pans, axes, or whatever they had in their hands, and hurried to the river. The Indians swarmed from their lodges and raced along the bank, eager to see the stirring of the great, icy monster.

It was truly a marvellous spectacle which met their view. Far up the Yukon the vast field was moving irresistibly onward. From shore to shore the wildest confusion reigned as the huge blocks of ice tore and jammed one another in their rapid rush. Now a massive, sparkling fragment would be lifted into the air, held for a time as if in a vise, and then, released, would plunge with a roar beneath the surface, to emerge hundreds of feet below like some monster of the sea. Logs, swept down from tributary streams, snapped like pipe-stems in the merciless grip, while trees, torn roots and all from the banks, were whirled along like wisps of hay.

Where the banks were steep and high the crush was terrible, and the ice wedged and jammed as if struck by the sledge of Thor. The water rose accordingly, and every creek was inundated for miles back.

After the river became clear of ice anxious days of waiting followed. When would the steamer come? That was the question on the lips of all. At length their patience was rewarded, for early one morning a shout was raised that at last she was coming. Far away down stream a film of white smoke was to be seen curling up into the sky. Nearer and nearer it approached, and then the wheezy puffing could be faintly heard, sounding like the sweetest of music to the weary, waiting ones. Steadily she approached, bravely stemming the racing current, until at length her smoke-stack and pilot-house appeared above the bank. She was a jaunty little craft, and had made a noble struggle up that northern stream, laden with supplies. Rocks had ripped and scarred her hull; floating ice had damaged her small stern wheel, and for several days she had been stranded upon a bar. But she had conquered every obstacle, and now port was in sight.

Ere long the eager watchers were able to discern the steamer's name, for the sun resting upon the pilot-house showed clearly "The Arctic" in brightly gilded letters. The captain and the pilot were at their posts; the deck-hands were sitting below, well

forward, and the roaring furnace, with doors wide open, was throwing out its ruddy glow. Then a long, shrill blast ripped the air, followed by another, and yet another. Far from the distance came back the echo, Nature's answer and welcome to the little steamer.

For several hours Keith sat in the vestry of the church, which had been his dwelling place since his return from the Quelchie camp. He was surrounded by his mail. Papers and parcels of books strewed the floor, while on the table was a liberal supply of letters. He had been busily engaged upon the latter, and they brought him varied news; this of joy, that of sorrow.

He rose from the table, when his eye caught sight of an unopened letter lying on the floor which had fallen from the table. Quickly opening it, he ran his eyes over the contents, and as he did so his face flushed. He sat down again, re-read the letter, and then remained for some time in deep thought.

At length he arose and wended his way to the Radhurst cabin. Constance was not in. She had gone to Old Pete's grave, so her father told him. Would he come in and wait for her return?

"No, thank you," Keith replied. "I shall stroll that way myself. I want to visit the grave, too."

As he drew near the spot where the prospector was lying he beheld Constance kneeling by the side of the mound, arranging some early wild flowers she had

gathered that morning. How pretty she looked, and as Keith paused and watched her a pained feeling stole into his heart. She would leave on the steamer to-morrow, and what would the place be like without her? He was going, too, but how could he come back and carry on his work without her helpful presence? Would she return, too? The thought had often entered his mind. But how could he expect such a thing? How could he ask her to leave the comforts of civilization and dwell far off in the wilderness among a rude people? An involuntary groan escaped his lips, which caused Constance to start and to look suddenly up from her work.

"Oh, it is you, Mr. Steadman!" she remarked with a smile. "I didn't know any one was near."

"Miss Radhurst," said Keith suddenly, "will you please walk with me along this bank? I want to show you a very pretty scene."

"Yes, only let me finish my task. There, that is better, but oh, how soon the flowers fade! Now I am ready."

Side by side they wended their way along the bank, then down into a little valley close by the river, where a small stream purled through a grove of fir and cottonwood trees. Birds were flitting here and there, while a noisy squirrel, sitting on a high branch, chattered and scolded incessantly at the intruders into its domain.

"So you will leave in the morning?" said Keith, as if it were quite news to him.

"Yes. Everything is packed and ready."

"I am going, too."

"Yes, I know it, but you will come back again."

"Come back! Come back! Yes, I expect to come back, but to what?" returned Keith almost bitterly.

"Why, Mr. Steadman, I thought it would be such joy for you to return to your flock. And besides, have you not great plans in store for the Quelchie Indians, and the new mining town, of which we have talked so often. I think you have much in store."

"There is much," came the slow reply. "There is vast work yet to be done. But a letter has filled me with serious thoughts, and I have come to you for advice."

"To me! For advice!"

"Yes. Here is the letter, a fair-sized one, is it not? Well, the long and the short of it is this: I have been asked to go to Toronto to take charge of a church there. It is a great surprise."

"And you will accept?" queried Constance, with a far-away look in her eyes.

"Shall I?"

"Why do you ask me? I am not able to judge. It is too important a matter for me to decide."

"I ask you because—because I love you," Keith stammered. "Oh, Miss Radhurst—Constance—bear

with me," he pleaded, noticing her agitation. "You have talked about my returning to this country. You have pictured it out in glowing colours, and I know that I should be enthusiastic. But I cannot, for when I come back you will not be here. Wait, please wait a little longer!" he cried, as Constance endeavoured to speak. "You know not how I love you. Ever since I saw you that wild night at Siwash Creek your image has been enshrined in my heart. Through that terrible trial, on the long trail, and out in the Quelchie camp, the story of which I have told you over and over again, you were ever with me. My love has intensified; it has become a burning fire. And oh, Constance! tell me, is there any response? Dare I hope for any return of my love?"

He was close to her now, looking passionately into her face, from which all the colour had fled. Her eyes remained fixed upon the ground as she listened to his rapid words. Her heart was beating fast, and only with an effort could she control her voice.

"What has this to do with your decision about that church in Toronto?" she slowly asked, with averted face.

"It means much. If you consent to become my—wife, I might accept that offer."

"And why?"

She turned as she spoke and looked him full in the eyes. In her words Keith detected a note of surprise and reproach.

"For—for your sake," he stammered.

"For my sake?"

"Yes. The life would not be so hard there. You would have comforts which you could not obtain here."

"And you would give up your grand work in the North, where you have had such success and so promising a future, for a—a woman? Surely you do not mean it!"

"But what would life be like here without the woman I love? It would be unbearable!"

"And would a woman be worthy of your love unless she were willing to share your lot wherever it might be? A true, loving wife would rather be with her husband in the midst of the fight, by his side to sustain and comfort him in his trials. Then, where love reigned, the little log cabin would be a more blessed spot than a palace where love was not."

"Constance! oh, Constance! can you give me that love? Could you be happy with me in a rough frontier town? Tell me. Tell me, do you love me?"

"Mr. Steadman——," she began.

"Not that! Not that!" he cried passionately.

"Well, Keith, then. Oh, Keith, I do love you! I have loved you so long, but I am not worthy of your love, and—and—"

"Darling! My darling!" he cried, clasping her in his arms and imprinting upon her lips the sacred

betrothal seal. "You are mine at last! My very own! Oh, my darling, I am so happy!"

"And I am happy, too," Constance replied. "My heart is just singing with joy."

The sun shone brightly through the trees and kissed the happy lovers; the little brook babbled and laughed joyously at their feet; all around the birds flitted and carolled in the fresh, balmy air, while from the depths of Keith's heart came the fervent "Father, I thank Thee."

THE END.